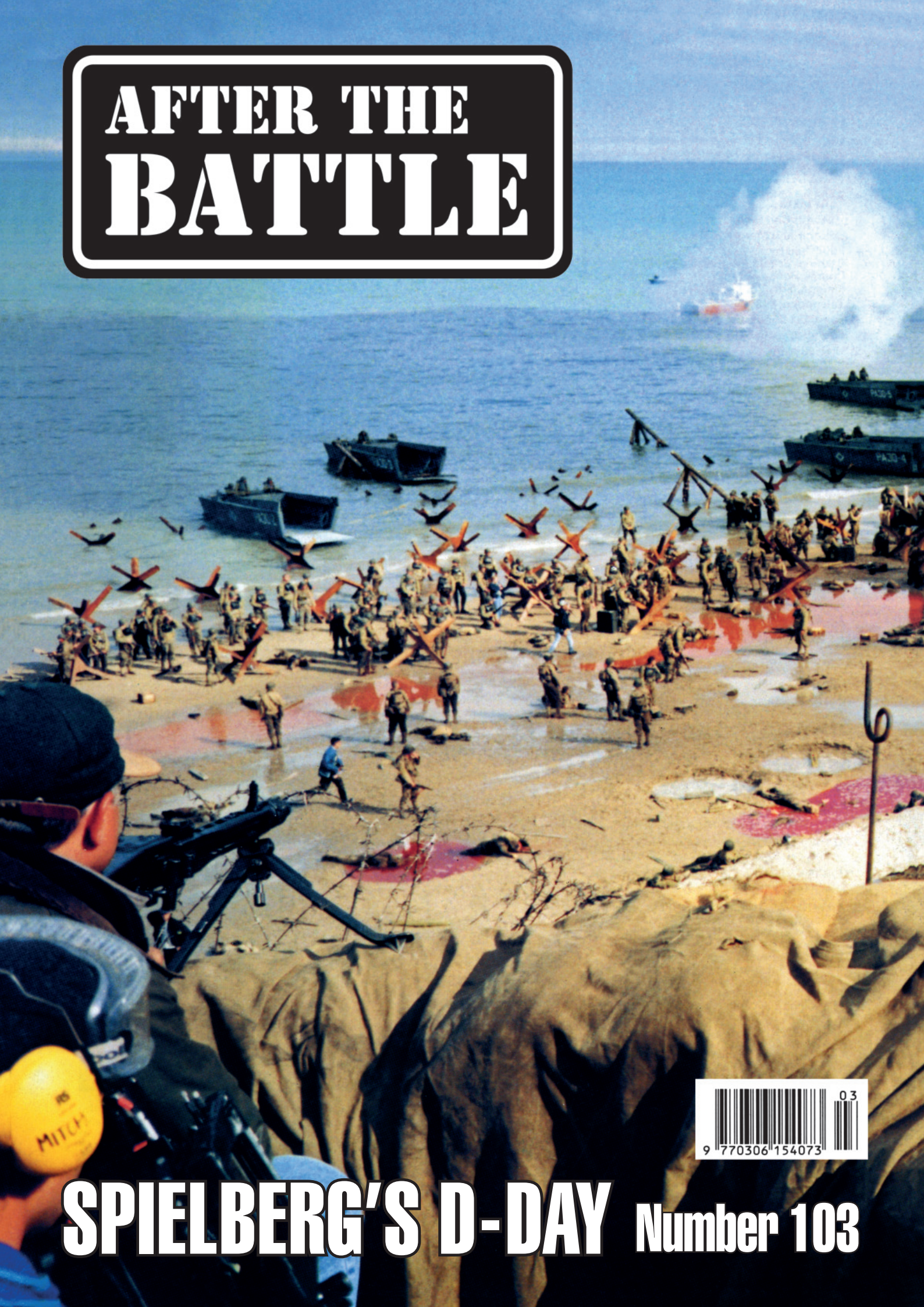
AFTER THE BATTLE



SPIELBERG'S D-DAY

Number 103

AFTER THE BATTLE

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Editor-in-Chief: Winston G. Ramsey

Editor: Karel Margry

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Battle of Britain International Ltd.,
Church House, Church Street,
London E15 3JA, England

Telephone: 0181-534 8833

Fax: 0181-555 7567

E-mail: afterthebattle@mcmail.com

Web site:
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Front Cover: Recreating the bloodbath of Omaha Beach for *Saving Private Ryan* filmed on the shores of Ireland. (Dreamworks SKG)

Back Cover: Normandy in Hertfordshire. Steven Spielberg's film set was built on Hatfield airfield in the summer of 1997. *Top:* Taken on Sunday, July 20, just prior to filling the canal with water. (*After the Battle*) *Bottom:* Filming underway. (Dreamworks SKG)

Acknowledgements: The Editor is endebted to all those contributors who helped put together the article on the making of *Saving Private Ryan,* and to Dreamworks SKG who retain the copyright to all images from the film. We also extend our appreciation to Michel de Trez for his generous assistance with the provision of illustrations for the feature on the battle for St Sauveur-le-Vicomte.

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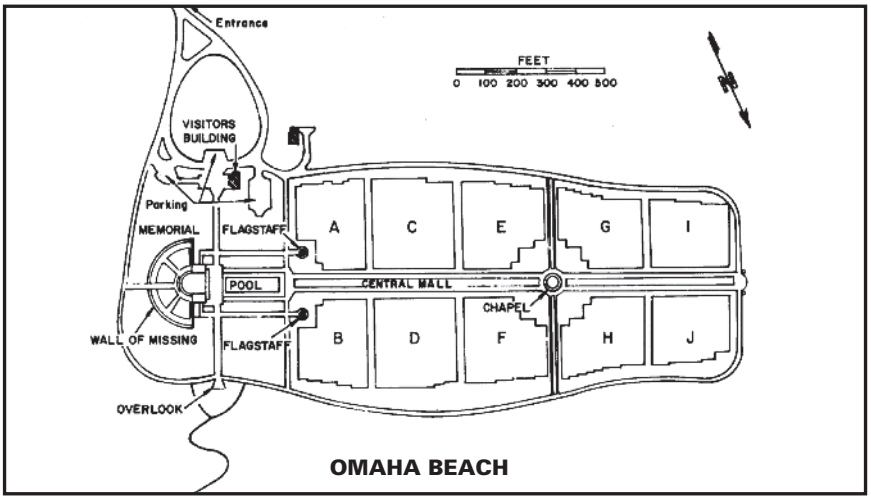


OMAHA BEACH

Steven Spielberg's movie *Saving Private Ryan* is the story of an American squad detailed to find and bring back a soldier after three of his brothers have been killed in battle. There are at least three historical instances in the Second World War in which American families lost three brothers. Stephen Ambrose in *Band of Brothers* describes the 'saving' of Fritz Niland, one of four brothers serving during the war. Sergeant Robert J. Niland was a member of the 3rd Platoon, Company D of the 2nd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry, 82nd Airborne Division. He was killed on June 6, 1944 at Neuville-au-Plein and is now buried in the American Cemetery *(above)* which lies above Omaha Beach, in Plot F, Row 15, Grave 11. His brother, 2nd Lieutenant Preston T. Niland, belonged to the 22nd Infantry Regiment of the 4th Infantry Division and was killed inland from Utah Beach on D+1. He is buried beside Robert in Grave 12. The third brother, Technical Sergeant Edward Niland, was an air gunner in the Far East and was shot down over Burma in May 1944. The US War Department assumed he was dead and the family were informed though he had in actual fact been made prisoner and he returned 14 months later. Another family to lose three brothers were the Testers: Sergeant Robert D. Tester died November 11, 1943, while with the 35th Division in England; his brother James, a sergeant in the 4th Division, was killed on September 17, 1944, during an attack on the Siegfried Line near Prüm; Glen, a Pfc in the 36th Division, was killed on January 9, 1945, near Bitche in the Vosges mountains. A fourth brother, Carol, was never called up by the War Department for compassionate reasons. The three Testers now lie buried beside one another in Henri Chapelle US Cemetery, Belgium, in Plot B, Row 14, Graves 18-20. Three brothers were also lost by the Dennewitz family of Chillicothe, Ohio. John was killed first by an artillery barrage near Saint Lô on July 18 and James by machine-gun fire in Germany on April 15, 1945. Having lost two sons, their mother May appealed to the US War Department for her third son William, then serving with the US Navy in the Pacific, to be removed from combat. However, what she did not know was that even before her appeal reached Washington, William had been killed on a minesweeper hit by a kamikaze near Okinawa the day after James' death. After the war, May Dennewitz asked for her sons to be brought home and in March 1949 the remains of the three brothers reached the family farm where they laid in state, a framed photo of each son standing on top of the flag-draped coffins. These were then buried side by side in Chillicothe's Greenlawn Cemetery.

The 'saved' James Ryan visits Omaha Cemetery with his family — a scene from the film. The bemedalled veteran seen standing in the background as the old Ryan walks into the St Laurent Cemetery is Phillippe Jutras, the curator of the Airborne Museum at St Mère-Eglise (and a Normandy veteran himself — he landed on July 24, 1944). Jutras, an American who has lived in France since 1972, has passed on his interview tapes of Normandy veterans to Stephen Ambrose and, through Ambrose, came in contact with Spielberg who then offered him this short appearance in the film.

SPIELBERG'S D-DAY

The masterful recreation of the disastrous landing at 'Bloody Omaha' sets *Saving Private Ryan* head and shoulders above all the D-Day films that have gone before. 'Tell it the way it really was', the veterans told Director Steven Spielberg, 'not like a Hollywood movie'. And the veterans' verdict is that at last war has been portrayed as it really is using every ounce of creative cinematography, surround sound and special effects to bring the viewer into the very heart of the action.

The Americans' decision in 1944 to pit men — rather than specialised armour — against the steel and concrete defences of this section of the Normandy coast, and to assault a beach where the defenders had the advantage of occupying the high ground, led to D-Day's 'near run thing'. Three vital elements in the pre-invasion plan also went awry. First, fate determined that one of the German reserve divisions had been moved up to that very sector for a defence exercise just hours before the landing. Secondly, the aerial bombardment which was to hit the coastal defences just before touchdown, fell up to three miles inland, and finally the 30-odd DD amphibious tanks, reluctantly included late in the invasion plan to pierce the beach obstacles and deal with the strong points, were launched too far out and were swamped by the heavy sea. Although not actually illustrated in the fictitional story of *Saving Private Ryan,* these were the key elements to the disaster which befel the men of the US 1st and 29th Divisions on Omaha Beach at 6.30 a.m. on June 6, 1944.

Since then, D-Day has been brought to the screen several times, perhaps the most notable being Darryl F. Zanuck's *The Longest Day* in 1961 (see *After the Battle* No. 4). The documentary style of that black-and-white film was hailed at the time as a definitive work, covering as it does all the various aspects of the invasion but, since then, film-making — and film-makers — have moved on. Over the years, the restraints which then operated against depicting violence and mayhem have largely been broken yet, even by the standards of the late 1990s, *Ryan* has shocked audiences around the world. In America, the film was given an 'R' (restricted) rating allowing accompanied youngsters under 17 to see it while in Britain, the sometimes inexplicable Board of Film censors took an equally courageous — yet exemplary — decision that this was a film with an important message (or many messages), and decided that it would also be given a '15' classification. For many of this younger generation, *Ryan* has been a very sobering experience, but for the dwindling numbers of ex-Servicemen, it has at last brought their sufferings and sacrifice to the fore.

Scriptwriter Robert Rodat, quoted in the DreamWorks production notes, claims that the concept behind his story had its origins in a small New England village. 'A number of books were published [in 1994] to commemorate D-Day', writes Rodat, 'and I was reading them when my [second] son was born. I live for much of the year in a small New Hampshire town [Putney Corners] and I would take my new son for walks in the early morning hours. In the town square there's a monument to those from the village who died in war dating back to the American Revolution. In almost every war, there were repeated last names — brothers who were killed in action. The thought of losing a son to war is painful beyond description; the thought of losing more than one is inconceivable.'

Back in 1942, following the deaths of the five Sullivan brothers who had lost their lives on the USS *Juneau* which was torpedoed near Guadalcanal in November that year, President Roosevelt issued instructions that in future if any American family lost more than two sons, the remaining boys would be relieved of future duty. In the case of Fritz Niland, who was serving with Company H, 3rd Battalion of the 501st Parachute Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, it was the 501st's chaplain, Captain Francis L. Sampson, (seen *top* ministering to the division's dead on June 17, 1944) who was instrumental in getting him sent back to the States although Father Sampson describes (in his book *Look Out Below!*) that Fritz sought him out, not the other way around. The Niland story was certainly known to both Rodat and Spielberg, and was discussed during the filming, although DreamWorks insist — most likely to avoid legal or copyright claims — that the film is not based on the brothers and that instead the story was conceived by Rodat spotting family names on the Civil War memorial in his home town. Yet two Niland cousins and grandchildren were flown to Hollywood by DreamWorks for the premiere so it undoubtedly had some influence on the genesis of *Saving Private Ryan*.

DreamWorks main location in Britain was at the disused ex-de Havilland/British Aerospace airfield at Hatfield. So for the scene at the US Army casualty office in Washington *(above),* **the film crew merely moved down the corridor of the administrative block, using some of the BAe furniture still extant to set the scene. During the de Havilland days, this was the engineering design building dating from 1934, so all their aircraft, from the DH88 Comet on, would have been born here.**

Thus was born the idea in Rodat's mind which he then set in the time frame of the Second World War. He firmly insists that the film is fictional yet the Private Ryan scenario closely mirrors the true story of the Niland brothers in which one is killed on D-Day; the second on D+1; the third posted missing believed killed in the Far East, whereupon the fourth is pulled out of Normandy. We put the question to Rodat but he insisted that 'it [the film] was not based on the Niland brothers. The background and inspiration for the film came from many books, newspaper and magazine accounts, archival footage, conversations with veterans, and other sources.'

Rodat floated the initial storyline with film producer Mark Gordon of the Mutual Film Company — a motion picture production and financing organisation — who was very enthusiastic. 'It had the elements of a powerful human drama within an exciting action tale', says Gordon, 'and I instantly responded to it.'

Over the next year, Rodat worked through 11 drafts as the screenplay was developed. At the same time, Tom Hanks was approached to play the leading rôle. 'We were thrilled when he expressed an interest in the project', Gordon's partner Gary Levinsohn explains. Hanks revealed that he had always been fascinated by World War II, and was always searching for books 'that depict the war as a human experience as opposed to a tactical one'. However, Gordon and Levinsohn had to work fast as their chosen studio, Paramount, was already toying with making two other war films, Bruce Willis' *Combat* and Arnold Schwarzenegger's *With Wings As Eagles.*

Coincidentally, the screenplay was shown to Steven Spielberg whose own fascination with the Second World War is evident in many of his films. Even as a teenager he had made an amateur World War II action adventure film, titled *Escape to Nowhere,* and Spielberg has revealed that he 'grew up watching war movies which had a tremendous influence on me'. His screen achievements are legendary but it was his graphic storytelling of *Schindler's List* in 1994 that set a new standard for the authentic portrayal of the history of the Second World War. He was introduced to the *Saving Private Ryan* story in the spring of 1997 and from then on the project became a reality, Spielberg's own company DreamWorks SKG co-financing the production with Paramount.

Though Spielberg was thrilled that Tom Hanks had been signed up, nevertheless he had some misgivings as Hanks was also a close friend. However, any doubts the two may have had about working together were quickly dispelled.

Dear Madam,

I've been shown in the files of the War Department, a statement of the Adjutant General of Massachusetts, that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle.

I feel how weak and fruitless it must be, any words of mine, that would attempt to beguil you from the grief, of the loss so overwhelming, but I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save.

I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, the solemn pride, that must be yours, to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Yours very sincerely and respectfully,

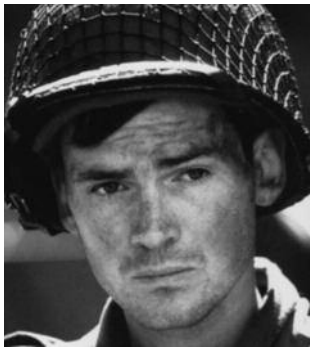
Abraham Lincoln.

The inclusion of the Abraham Lincoln letter was an unscripted addition and one of which Steven Spielberg is particularly proud. It is a good illustration of how he will depart from a script — sometimes quite drastically as we shall see — if he can improve on a scene or piece of action.

Left: **For General Marshall's office, the art department converted the director's office overlooking the car park.** *Right:* **The beautiful period saloons brought in by Alan Tomkins, the Art Director responsible for all the vehicles on the film. They would have been visible through the window behind Marshall's desk, but never appeared in shot.**

Captain John H. Miller (Tom Hanks), killed by 'Steamboat Willie' in the final battle.

Sergeant Horvath (Tom Sizemore), dies of wounds at the last position by the bridge.



Corporal Upham (Jeremy Davies), one of only two survivors from the team.

Tech/4 Wade (Giovanni Ribisi), the medic, mortally wounded in the radar station attack.

'I've always had tremendous respect for Tom', Spielberg says, 'and this experience enhanced my respect for him, both as an actor and as a human being. He offered great suggestions that benefitted the film and was completely open to my ideas about the character.' Spielberg adds: 'One of the themes of the story is: who is Miller . . . and who *was* he? Without flashing back or using any "tricks", can we see another side to him? It was very challenging in that regard.'

Captain Miller is even something of an enigma to the man who has fought by his side for years, Sergeant Horvath. Tom Sizemore, who plays the veteran soldier, says about him: 'Sarge might know more about Miller than the other guys, but he doesn't know a lot either. Regardless, he is "by-the-book", his first priority is to take care of his captain, to protect him and make sure that he gets out alive.'

If Sergeant Horvath is Miller's 'right arm', then the thorn in his side is Private Reiben, a wisecracking New Yorker who makes no secret of his resentment about risking his life to save one private. A rising film-maker in his own right, Edward Burns won the part after Spielberg noted his performance in Burns' award-winning debut film. Spielberg explains: 'I saw *The Brothers McMullen,* and immediately saw Eddie as Reiben. He has that dry Brooklyn quality, and knows how to get a laugh without milking it.'

'When I read the part of Reiben, I thought "this is a guy I can really have some fun with"', Burns revealed, but he is quick to clarify that the term 'fun' must be taken in context. 'These guys see so much horror that they have to mask some of their pain through dark humor. I think Reiben is trying his best to make light of the horrific things he witnesses. So, when I say 'fun', I mean it's an interesting opportunity for me as an actor to portray these kinds of emotions.'

To play the other soldiers in the squad, DreamWorks brought together an ensemble of young actors. Vin Diesel is Private Caparzo, a tough New York Italian with a gentle side; Giovanni Ribisi plays Wade, the squad's dedicated medic; Barry Pepper is Private Jackson, a Bible-quoting Tennessee sharpshooter; and Adam Goldberg plays Private Mellish, a Jewish kid from Yonkers, who knows he has more at stake in fighting the Nazis.

The object of the squad's mission: Ryan, Private (actually Private First Class) James, played by Matt Damon during the 1944 action, and by Harrison Young as the veteran returning to Normandy. In the film, Ryan's unit is Company B, 1st Battalion of the 506th Parachute Infantry of the 101st Airborne Division. The 'real' Ryan, Fritz Niland, who died in 1988 belonged to Company H of the 3rd Battalion of the 501st.

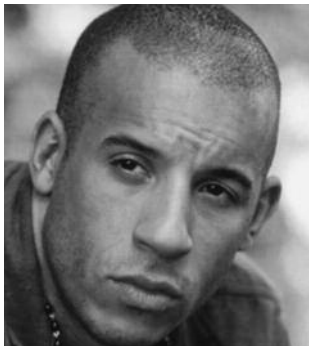
The one outsider joining the group is Corporal Upham, a bookish young man who finds himself impressed into Captain Miller's squad when their interpreter is killed on D-Day. Jeremy Davies plays the 'fish-out-of-water', who Spielberg says serves an important purpose in the drama. 'Upham's never been under fire, never seen the panic and chaos of battle first-hand so I think he represents the audience. Through Upham, they get to come along for the ride, following Miller and his men into war.'

Davies himself believes that the character portrays someone 'not having even an inkling that he might get close to combat and then being thrown in the thick of it. It's quite a journey for Upham, and he goes through quite an evolution.'

Following on from his Oscar-nominated performance in *Good Will Hunting,* Matt Damon portrays the object of their mission, Private (actually Pfc) James Ryan. Damon, commenting on his part, says that 'Ryan becomes a symbol for Miller and his men, because his going home would represent all of them going home'.

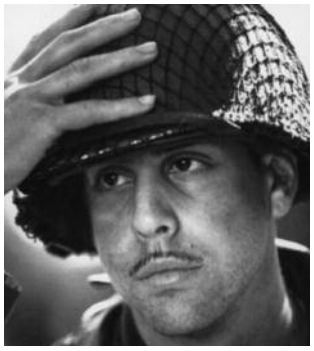
Arriving on the set after the other members of the cast had already spent several weeks filming together was, for Damon, much like Ryan finally meeting up with Miller's squad as depicted in the script. 'None of us knew what to make of each other at first, which was perfect for the story', Damon recalls, explaining that it was Spielberg who ultimately broke the ice. 'It's amazing to work with him; you feel just lucky to be there. He knows exactly what he wants, and when he gets it, it's a great feeling for everyone. It draws you in and makes you part of the team.'

Unlike the actors playing Miller's squad, the part of Private Ryan did not require Damon to endure the military-style basic training which the other actors were subjected to. 'I would have liked to have done it', he says, although 'liked' might not be the word his fellow-castmates would have chosen.



Private Caparzo (Vin Diesel), shot by the German sniper in the battle in the rain.

Private Jackson (Barry Pepper), the sniper, killed by the SP gun in the tower.



Private Mellish (Adam Goldberg), killed by the SS trooper in the bayonet fight.

Private Reiben, (Edward Burns), the second man to survive from the eight-man team.

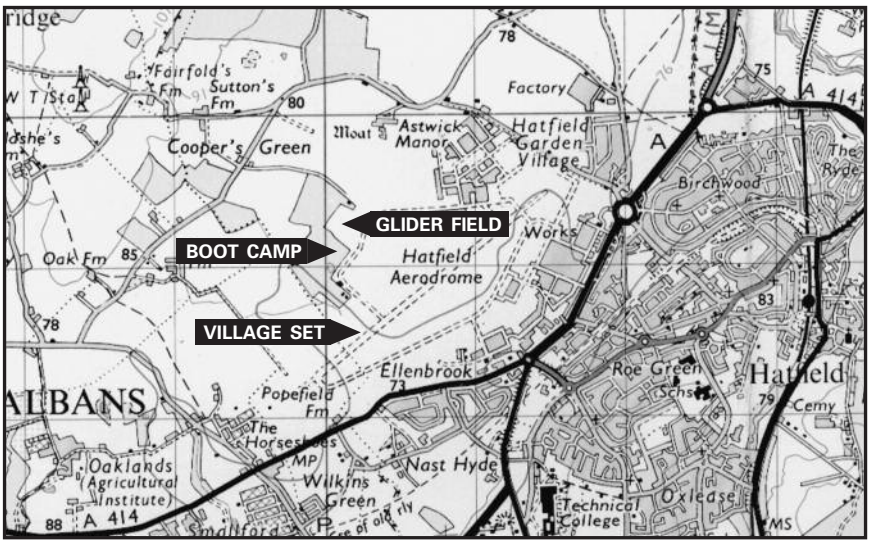
Ex-Vietnam veteran Dale Dye, the film's Senior Military Advisor, with Miller's squad in the woodland behind the airfield where 'boot camp' was set up. With them are the British forces armourer, Joss Scottowe (kneeling left), and Warriors Inc. personnel Brian Maynard (kneeling right) with John Barnett and Laird Macintosh at the rear.

BOOT CAMP

'Director Steven Spielberg gave me the most welcome marching orders for *Saving Private Ryan* that any old soldier can hear', says Dale Dye — the ex-US Marine captain who acted as the film's Senior Military Adviser. "Just make it real", Steven said. So, given those mission-type orders, I had a fairly free hand with historical accuracy, the staging of combat scenes and training the performers. I approached the project like one of the brigadier's subordinate field commanders and set about training my troops for the scheduled D-Day invasion. I had ten full days — and only ten days — to turn pampered actors into American Rangers, circa 1944.

'Assembling the performers at the old British Aerospace plant in Hatfield where frenzied preparation of uniforms, equipment and props was ongoing, I introduced them to my Warriors Inc. staff including First Sergeant John Barnett, combat medic T/5 Brian Maynard and Platoon Guide Corporal Laird Macintosh. The first three days were spent in my 'School of the Soldier' which included all the basics of deportment and military bearing as well as weapons maintenance and familiarisation on such now-obsolete items as the M1 Garand rifle, M1 Carbine, M1918 Browning Automatic Rifle, M1A1 Thompson sub-machine gun and M1911A1 .45-calibre pistol. The actor-troopers worked with each weapon until they could field-strip and reassemble it in the dark and load it quickly and precisely without taking their eyes off the target. As a major part of this phase of training, I spent long hours briefing them on the background of America's wartime situation just prior to the Normandy invasion. They were in England where many Yanks polished their skills prior to crossing the Channel, so the reality hit home. Just prior to the field phase of their combat training, I told the assembled actors my basic philosophy for this project. "Under no circumstances", I told them forcefully, "will you be allowed to do anything on screen which would embarass or demean the brave men who fought and died for their nation in World War II. I will do everything in my power to ensure that what we produce from now on is a long-overdue salute to those men. You will work and sweat and suffer to get it right . . . because it's the right thing to do. If you think this is just another movie, I will quickly change your mind about that. This is a tribute . . . and you are the vehicle by which we will make that tribute."

'Then it was onto the field phase of training. I selected a patch of woods on the British Aerospace property which was well away from ongoing construction and featured the sort of thick brush and rolling terrain that was typical of the bocage area of Normandy and took my staff and the soldiers undergoing training to the field. They were allowed to take only such comfort items any GI would have had back in 1944 . . . and nothing more. They lived under leaky canvas which became a real distraction once the typical English chilly rain began to fall. They were allowed only one wool blanket, ate British military rations and worked from sun up until sun down . . . and frequently through the night. Before the sun broke the horizon, I had them up for calesthenics specially designed to encourage teamwork. They ran from three to five miles each morning along the abandoned runways, singing and chanting all the way. Speed was not important; endurance and finishing together as a unit was the key. Then began a gruelling schedule of weapons firing (which gave some of the Hatfield residents a fright or two), small-unit tactics, individual tactical measures, field first aid, assault on fortified positions and virtually every item covered in the US Army infantry manuals of the era. We covered it all in a progressive manner with the troops gradually assuming their scripted roles.



'We were playing soldiers who were tired and miserable and wanted to go home', said Hanks, 'and I don't think we could have done that justice without having experienced what Dale Dye put us through. I think he was trying to instil in us the idea that when you think you can't go any farther, you can. You just have to decide to do it . . . which is exactly the situation in which many of the men involved in the Normandy invasion found themselves.'

'Each evening I held what has come to be called a "Stand Down". At this point, the actors were allowed and encouraged to ask any question of me or my staff that they wanted to pursue. During these periods — usually following the second of only two meals allowed per day — the men talked about the philosophical and psychological aspects of combat soldiering that would help them perform when filming began. We entertained every conceivable question from "what does it feel like to get shot?" to "can you give us a short-cut to dealing with these damn canvas leggings?"

Since my personal philosophy has always been that no performer can ever accurately portray a soldier unless he's walked a tough mile or two in that soldier's boots, this time in the field was extremely valuable. It was also very tough on the actors. I pulled no punches and pushed them hard day and night. They were filthy, exhausted, feverish and complaining . . . but I pressed on telling them simply that the men who assaulted that beach at Normandy were also filthy, sick and tired.

'We completed the field phase of training with a major day-long exercise that included long compass marches, an attack on a heavily-defended position and a night attack. They were physically ready. Now it was up to me throughout the filming to keep them mentally ready for what was to come. I was very fortunate during this ordeal to have welcome and competent help from ex-Major Robin Cope of the Parachute Regiment and British Special Operations soldier Joss Scottowe who served as my armourer.

'We then immediately boarded an airplane and flew to Ireland where filming of the Omaha Beach landing would take place in County Wexford. Waiting for me and my staff were some 850 Irish reserve soldiers who would play Americans from the 29th Infantry Division and the 1st Infantry Division during the assault. My staff set up a sort of 'sausage-grinder' training pipeline for these men which included wear of the period American uniforms, weapons handling, small boat/landing craft techniques and individual tactical measures. All were ready for action in three gruelling training days. This was a classic example of the value of good, solid NCOs. As I was required to be forward with the camera crew and the Director, my NCOs handled the entire project. As an experienced officer, I realised the best thing I could do was clear off and let them handle it. They delivered a superb combat unit and were directly responsible for much of the riveting action you see on the beach during the first 25 minutes of *Saving Private Ryan.'*

However, not all the actors felt the same. 'I didn't want to do it', Sizemore admits. 'The way I looked at it, just because I had to act like a soldier, why did I have to *be* a soldier? But something happened to us. We learned that you don't do anything by yourself in the military; it really is teamwork. If another guy is having a hard time—he can't get his gear on, he's sick, whatever—you stop and help him out. It brought us closer together, so when we started shooting the movie, we felt a bond.'

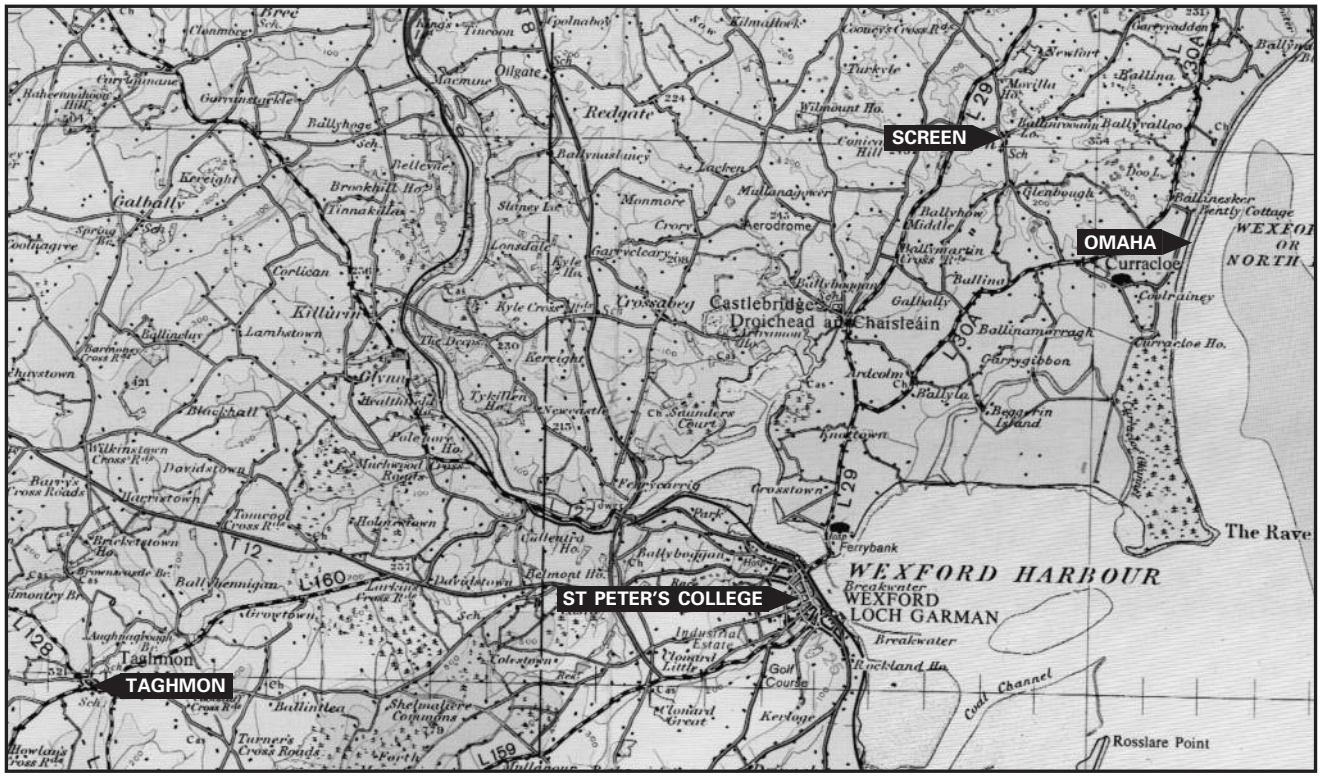
THE LOCATIONS

The job of finding suitable locations for a film rests primarily with the Associate Producer, in the case of *Ryan* Kevin de la Noy, and his Location Managers.

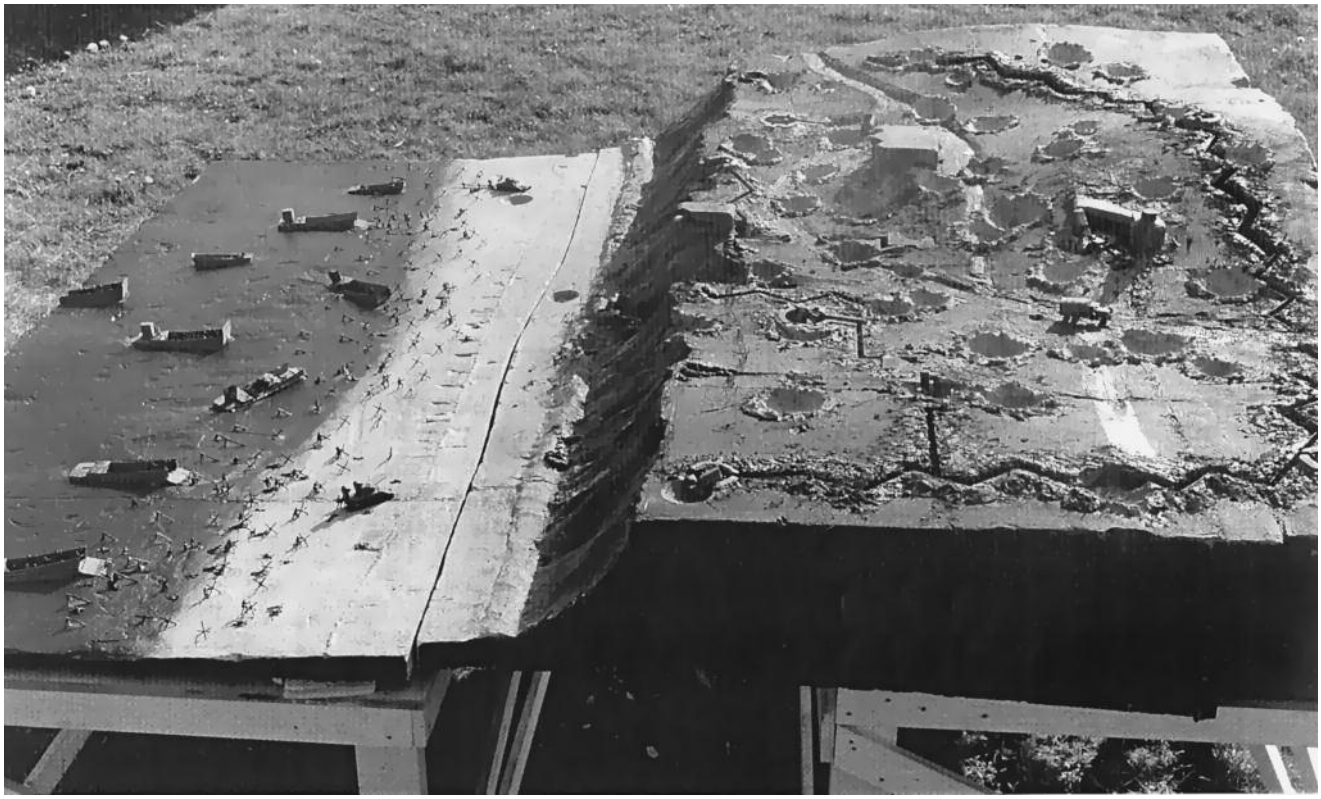
First priority was to select a beach to double as Omaha as there was no possibility of using the real beach which is not only a protected historical landmark but has changed significantly since 1944 with new developments and, of course, the establishment of the cliff-top US cemetery which features so strikingly in the opening and closing sequences. A variety of beaches in Britain and France were inspected and rejected before narrowing the choice down to the coastline near Sheringham in Norfolk. However, Spielberg needed the services of hundreds of extras to double as the landing force and, of necessity, these men needed to have had army training. He approached the British Government for assistance but was met by deaf ears so turned his sights to Ireland where the government was noted to be anxious to promote its resources to film-makers. The immediate offer of hundreds of Irish Army regulars — many of

Above: **The real Omaha ran for some 9,000 yards along the Normandy coast at the point where it was backed by bluffs some 100-200 feet high.**

Right and below: **Steven Spielberg's Omaha was recreated in Ireland during the spring of 1997 with the addition of 500 steel hedgehogs and wooden obstacles.**



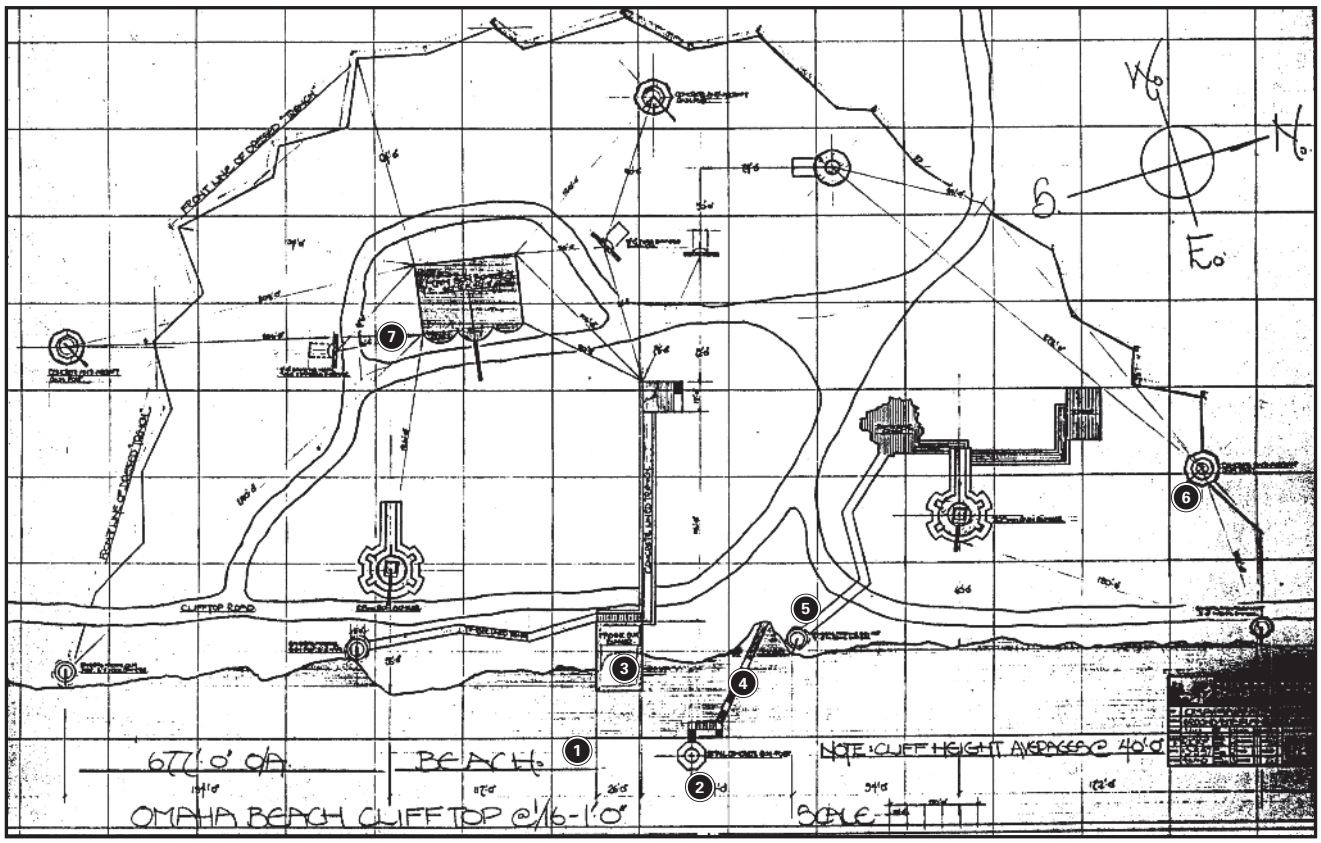
The Associate Producer, Kevin de la Noy, initially wanted to make the film in Britain, where a stretch of the north Norfolk coast had been inspected, but John Major's government was completely uninterested in helping with the loan of troops or members of the Territorial Army to act as extras, even though their wages would have been paid by DreamWorks. There was also the inference that the British Army did not want to see its men playing Americans! However, no such qualms existed in Ireland where Kevin had employed members of the FCA (Forsa Cosanta Aitiuil — the Irish Reserve Defence Force) to play Scotsmen in *Braveheart.* Back in July 1993, Wexford County Council had set up a film commission to exploit the generous tax breaks offered to film companies in the Finance Act of that year. They had already set up a database of suitable locations and every co-operation was offered, including the availability of hundreds of military-trained extras, to attract film-making to Wexford. Steven Spielberg wanted to shoot the landing sequences first, so the actors would have experienced its horror before moving into the rest of the filming and, of necessity, the production had to begin in June. Kevin was first drawn to the beach at Ballyvalloo but the convent on the cliff-top was being used as a retreat until August, so he had a second look at the Curracloe coastline and selected an alternative location, half a mile to the south at Ballinesker. To accommodate the hundreds of army extras (300 for four weeks and 800 for one week), St Peter's College in Wexford itself was made available by the Principal Jim Maxwell who offered every co-operation to transform the old dormitory and leisure centre into a temporary billet. The only blot on the landscape came when DreamWorks wanted to rent a field near the beach for a day to film Captain Miller's unit advancing through the French countryside. The landowner insisted on a fee of £12,000 which even the Wexford Film Commission could not get reduced so the unit switched to another location three miles inland at Screen. Although the film production notes tend to lead one to believe that the Omaha landing was shot first, in actual fact the first day's shooting took place at Screen on Friday, July 26, as preparations on the beach were not quite finished.



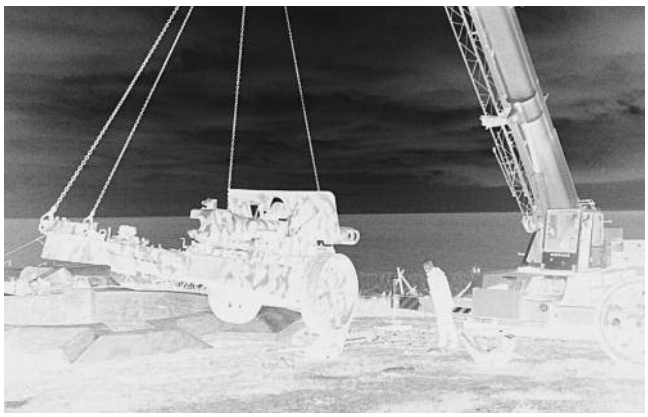
whom had recently 'acted' in Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* — and the discovery of a perfect stretch of coastline in County Wexford, settled the matter and production was switched across the Irish Sea.

A model of the fortifications to be built had been prepared in Hollywood and this was used by Production Designer Tom Sanders and his team to transform the Irish coast into German-held Normandy. An emplacement was constructed (out of wood and plaster) for a casemated gun and open gun pits for field pieces. Pillboxes, an observation bunker which was to feature prominently in the action, trenches and wire barricades (with rubber barbs where they might injure the actors) were set up behind the beach which was strewn with 500 steel hedgehogs and wooden anti-landing obstacles. Although the latter were anchored to concrete blocks, a storm wrecked many of them, necessitating them to be renewed. Also the hedgehogs kept sinking in the sand and so had to be regularly lifted and replaced.

Above: **A model of the defences to be built had already been prepared in Hollywood and these features were transferred to the Curracloe terrain** *(below).* **[1] 'Bring up the bangalores!' [2] Mirror-on-bayonet scene. [3] Bunker for flame-thrower sequence at rear. [4] Steps access to cliff-top. [5] Machine-gun post knocked out. [6] Control post where Corporal Upham is enlisted. [7] Command post scene**



The 15cm casemate, very similar to the four-gun battery at Longues-sur-Mer (see *D-Day Then and Now,* Volume 1, page 54), under construction on the top of the bluff with the model in the foreground. Alan Tomkins tells us that our two volumes on D-Day were extensively used as reference works for the film. Curracloe has the distinction of being a Blue Flag beach and the local council has jealously preserved its windswept beauty from exploitation. Nevertheless, it supported wholeheartedly the recreation of Omaha, and a public meeting at which DreamWorks, Wexford County Council, the Wexford Film Commission, the Department of Arts Culture and the Gaeltacht (the Gaelic speaking areas) were represented was held to keep the local population informed. The Department of the Marine and the Forest and Wildlife Service were also involved to ensure that the ecology was not irreparably damaged. All in all, the filming of *Saving Private Ryan* brought £4 million into the local economy.



As well as supplying all the vehicles, Steve Lamonby of Plus Film Services provided three guns for dressing the fortifications: a Skoda 10.5cm howitzer *(left),* the 15cm artillery piece for installation in the casemate *(top)* and a 2cm Flak 38 *(right).*

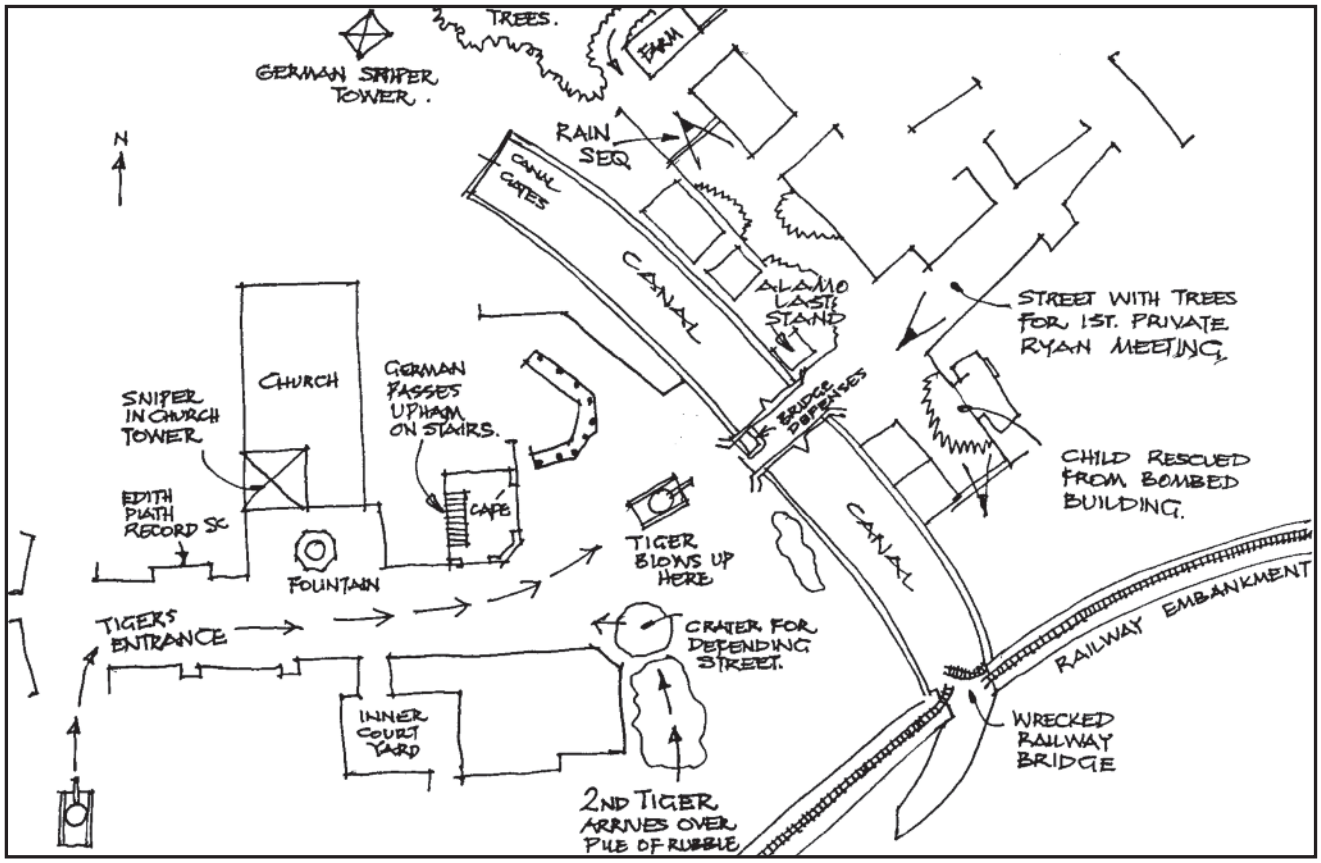
A location was also required to construct a reproduction of a blasted French town, complete with a river and bridges, and the recently-abandoned British Aerospace airfield at Hatfield, some 45 minutes north of London, proved an ideal location. Not only were there hundreds of acres available to build the set, and prepare a glider field, complete with Rommel's anti-invasion 'asparagus' and wrecked Wacos, but there was ample empty hangarage for garaging the vehicles required and to provide production facilities and office space. Indeed, we see the former de Havilland offices in the film. The US War Department casualty branch typing pool (using some of the old BAe desks found on site) was set up in a ground-floor office and US Army Chief-of-Staff General George C. Marshall (played by Harve Presnell) took over one of the director's offices on the first floor for his Washington office.

Working literally from the ground down, Sanders' team began building the Norman village by digging an actual river to be subsequently lined and filled with water. The excavated earth formed a railway embankment which, in turn, hid modern buildings on the far side of the airfield. While the Bailey type of railway bridge was to be in a wrecked

A model of a ruined French village was constructed in Los Angeles and sent over to Elstree Studios just before the production moved to Hatfield.

From derelict airfield . . . to Norman town. A site was chosen on the western side of the main NE-SW runway (see rear cover) to build the ruined town which was to double both as Neuville and Ramelle. *Above:* **First the river was excavated and the bridge constructed** *(below),* **steel-reinforced as it had to support the weight of a tank. A railway embankment was built up on the airfield side of the set using the excavated spoil to mask the de Havilland hangars and buildings on the eastern side of the airfield. A broken Bailey bridge was then set across the break in the line although the plausibility of how this Allied type of bridge could already have been in a French town before it was captured is not explained!**

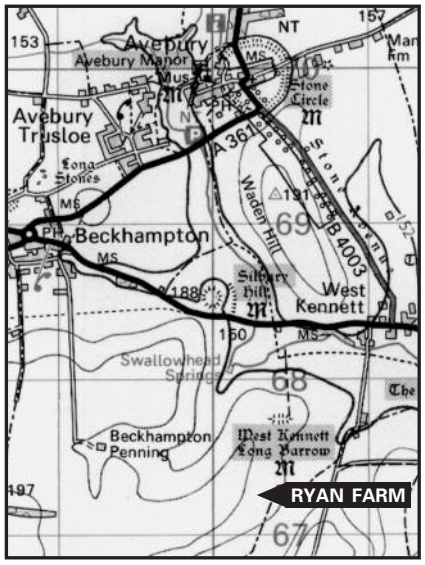
Left: **Looking north-east from the southern river bank. The 'river' was lined to hold water which was about three feet deep.** *Right:* **Over 500 lorry-loads of rubble were imported to dress the streets; unfortunately the inclusion of 9in×3in British bricks, like those lying on the tram-track in the foreground, are completely untypical of Normandy buildings.**



Alan Tomkins' sketch plan shows the layout and where the various action sequences were filmed.

Left: **The view south-east — the bend in the river cleverly hiding its extremity. The ruined Bailey is a double-double.**

Right: **Looking south-west towards the church and the direction from which the Tigers advance towards the bridge.**



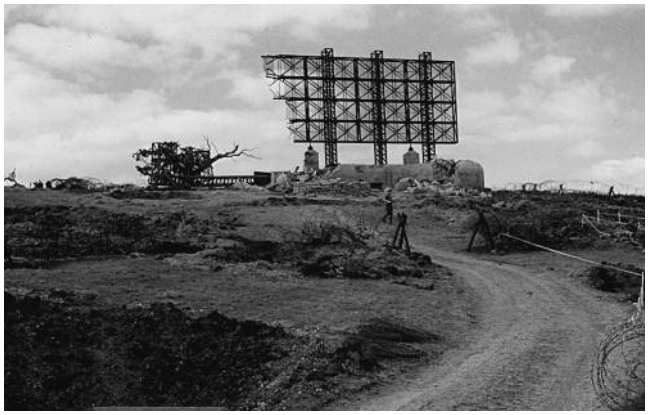
state, the road bridge had to be strong enough to support the weight of a tank. The village itself was based on a three-dimensional model constructed after location scouting trips to Normandy. This model had then been 'ruined' by carving out walls and roofs to simulate bomb damage until a realistic look had been obtained. The Hatfield set was then built in a 'ruined' state with corners and alleyways so the shooting could take place from several angles to cater for the different battle re-enactments which supposedly take place in different villages.

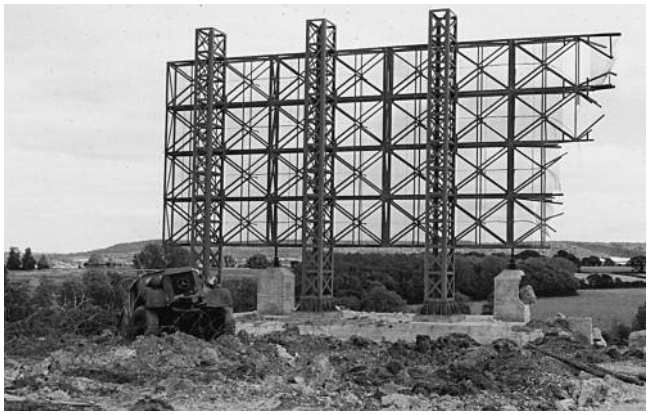
Other locations used were the Iowa farm, filmed at West Kennett, west of Marlborough, where full-size plywood cut-outs were set up to simulate the Ryan family farm, and Thame Park, Oxfordshire, where the German radar station was built. The ambushed US convoy scene subsequently cut from the film was also filmed in the park.

The location chosen was Tan Hill Farm at West Kennett, just south of Avebury, where the rolling wheatfield gave a good comparison with the American midwest. But why oh why could the tell-tale tractor tram-lines not have been disguised which immediately indicate post-war intensive farming?

Iowa in Wiltshire. The Ryan farmhouse was perfectly flat perspective painting save for the front porch, as was the barn. Alan Tomkins relates a humorous story when the electrician turned up one day. 'Can I park my truck in the barn?', he asked. 'You'll have a job', replied Alan.

Larry Carney drove his own Buick in this scene — the car having previously been shipped to Hungary for *Evita.* In one of the most moving sequences in *Private Ryan,* Mrs Margaret Ryan (Amanda Boxer) is given the news of the death of her three sons: Daniel on New Guinea, Shaun on Omaha on D-Day, and Peter on Utah on D+1. How news of the latter two could have reached Washington within three days is not explained but it would have been highly unlikely in June 1944.

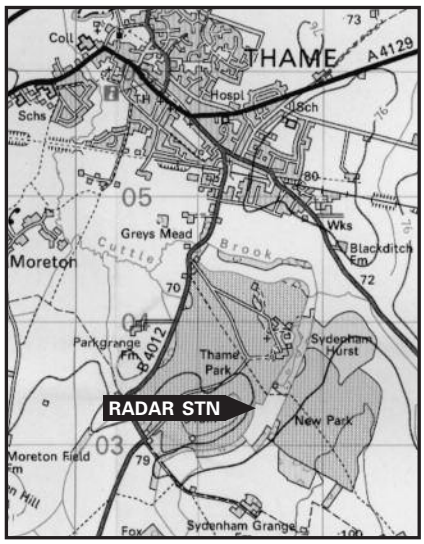




The German radar station was built in Thame Park, Oxfordshire, a venue often used as a film location.

This is the scene in which the audience is introduced to the German soldier nicknamed 'Steamboat Willie', played by Joerg Stadler. It is just prior to the attack on this position that the eagle-eyed cinemagoer will have noticed a slip in continuity.

As the men leave the glider field, a brief seven-second clip is included of the patrol walking across country. This has been lifted from the footage shot at Screen in Ireland but it shows eight men although Private Caparzo has already been killed!



A year after the filming, Thame Park has reverted to nature with little to mark the spot where the radar station was built, save for the tell-tale darker patches of weed. The gate to which Steamboat Willie was told to march can be seen in the centre.

Alan Tomkins was the Art Director engaged to look after all the hardware required: the vehicles, gliders and landing craft. Two British-built LCMs (Landing Craft, Mechanised) were tracked down at the Boston Boatyard at Oreston, Plymouth.

THE HARDWARE

'It was towards the end of January 1997 that I was first approached to join the forthcoming Steven Spielberg film with D-Day as its background', writes Art Director Alan Tomkins. 'The film was to be titled *Saving Private Ryan,* and would be starring Tom Hanks. I could not believe my good fortune, as being very interested in the history of WWII, especially the D-Day landings, this was the film I had been waiting for.

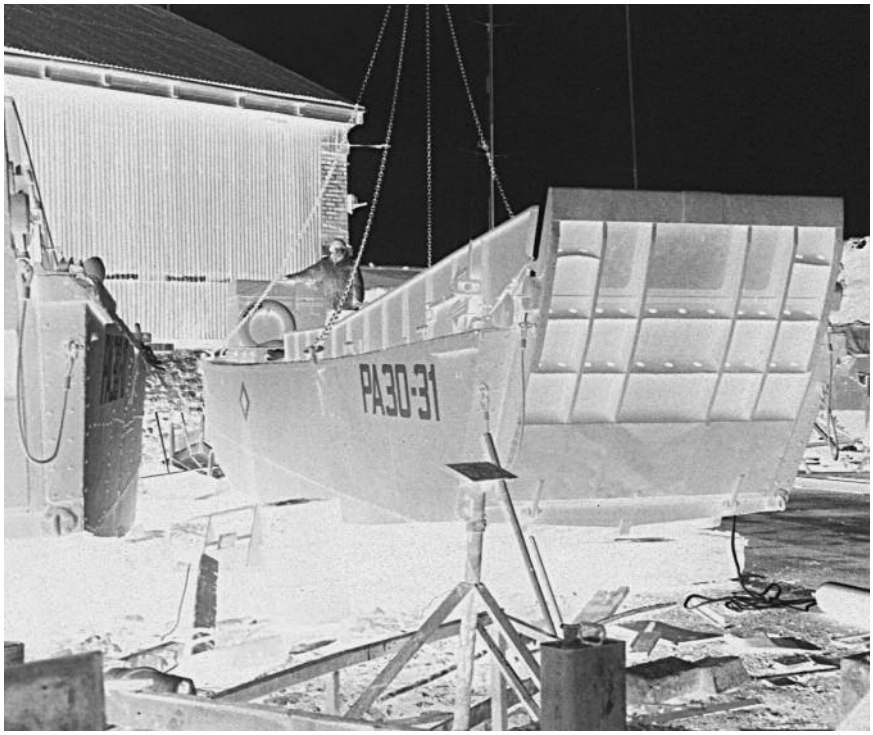
'Previously, I had set up the D-Day planning scenes for *Winds of War,* reproducing weather maps, etc., for the final decision to go on June 6 (incidentally, with Winston Ramsey as the Technical Advisor for this scene, I had to get it right as he is a stickler for detail — see *After the Battle* No. 58, page 47) but this was to be much more.

'Over the years my interest in the history of WWII has given me the opportunity to work on several war films including *Battle of Britain* (see *After the Battle* No. 1), *A Bridge Too Far* (issue 17), *The Heroes of Telemark* (issue 45) and *Memphis Belle* (issue 69), so I had built up a lot of contacts over the years who would help me with my research and during the filming.

'When Tom Sanders (the Production Designer) rang me from Los Angeles, he explained that he wanted me to look after all the hardware on the film. This would include the landing craft, big and small; the American and German vehicles, plus the building of six gliders and two Tiger I tanks.

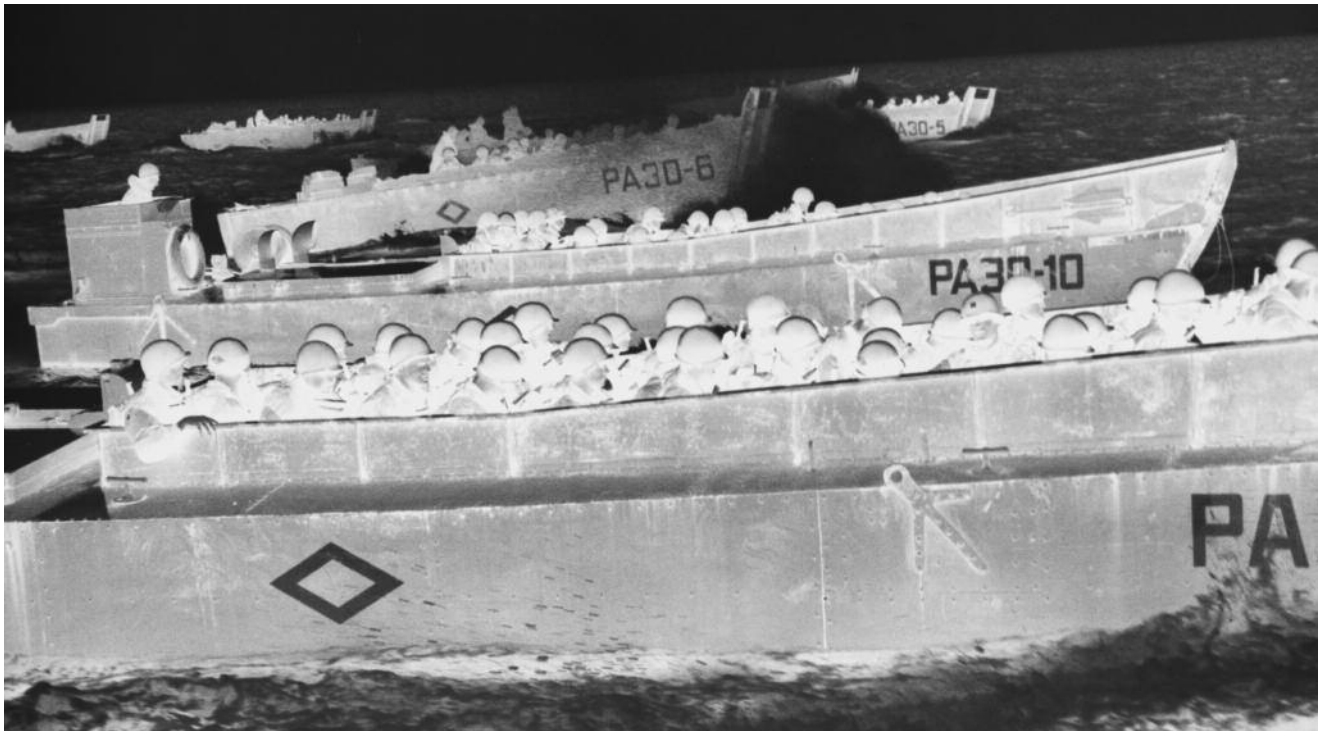
'Tom's task was no less daunting in the relatively short time we had available as he had to re-create Omaha Beach with all its defences plus a complete war-damaged French town with its own river and bridge.

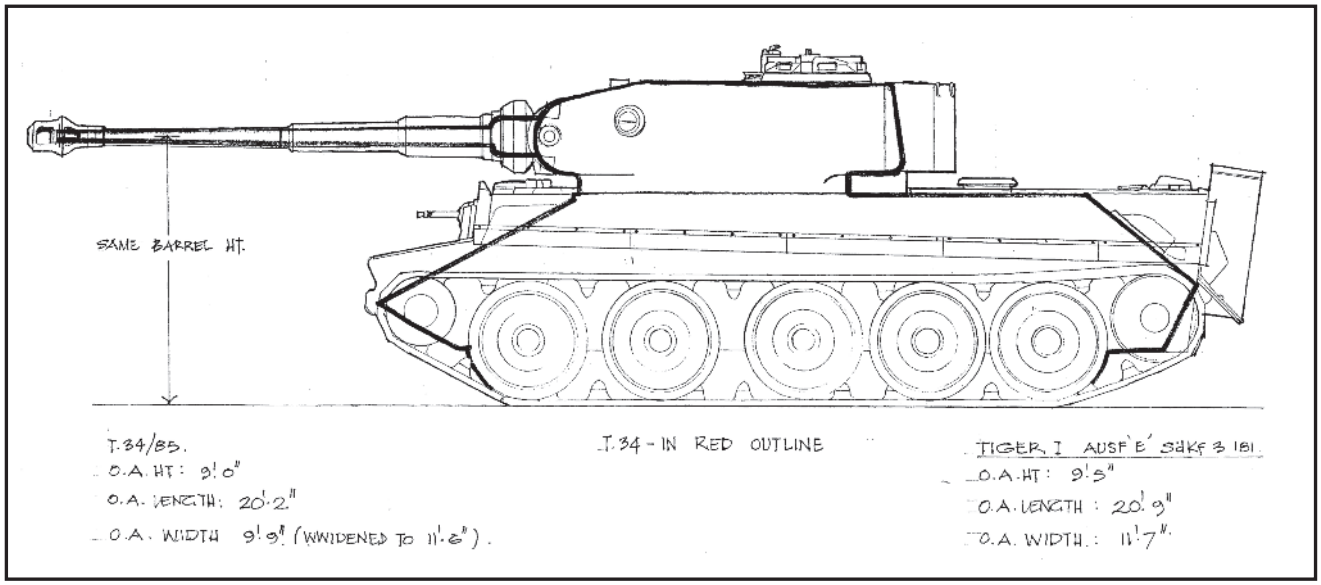
Apart from changing the engines, extensive alterations had to be made to give them the appearance of the 1944 period including cutting down the wheelhouse and adding higher sides.



'My first job was to set about tracking down every LCVP in the country but, with their hulls being constructed mainly in wood, most survivors were never going to pass the strict safety regulations laid down with regards to putting actors and extras into boats at sea. So I cannot tell you how pleased I was when Mark Huffam (our Associate Producer) told me that ten LCVPs had been located languishing in the desert in Palm Springs, California. We quickly worked out that it would be cheaper to ship them over than start building them from scratch, even though by then I had all the working drawings completed ready to go. Robin Davies (director of a company called Square Sail) had tracked them down, and to him fell the task of bringing them over as deck cargo to his boatyard in St Austell, Cornwall. Then he had to make them not only seaworthy, with working engines and full instrumentation, but he also had to contend with all my requirements of painting and the various period additions. All this had to be completed before they were shipped on low-loaders overland to Wexford in Ireland which had been chosen as the location for Omaha Beach.

James Wakefield, formerly of the Royal Marine Boat Squadron, undertook the conversion and restoration work on these two LCMs which were to act as 'hero' boats coded PA30-10 and PA30-31 (indicating that they are craft from US troopship APA 30 — the *Thomas Jefferson,* part of Assault Force 'O' for Omaha on D-Day). Meanwhile Robin Davies' company Square Sail was preparing the ten American LCVPs (Landing Craft, Vehicle/Personnel) found languishing at Palm Springs, California, which would appear in background shots. All were then shipped to Wexford.





For the two Tigers required, it was suggested to Alan that the Soviet T-55 would be the best tank to convert but he prepared this drawing to show that the T-34 was a better match for barrel height.

'At the time the search was progressing for the landing craft, I had to gather a specialist team together to build the two Tiger I tanks. These had to be in full working condition with guns firing (albeit by the special effects team) and turrets rotating. Plus Film Services were taken on as they had worked out the best feasability plan to convert two Soviet T-34s by building the Tiger's bodywork over them, and use the rotating turret mechanism to construct the larger Tiger turret over it. Steve Lamonby's and Peter Tombs' previous credit was building a mock-up Russian T-55 over a Saladin six-wheeled armoured car for the James Bond film *Goldeneye.* This was because the Russians would not allow a tracked vehicle to run over the cobblestones in and around St Petersburg.

'As a first step, Steve and I went down to measure the only Tiger in 'captivity' in Britain at the Tank Museum at Bovington. This enabled me to start work on the overall layout drawings. At the same time, two T-34s were purchased, stripped down, rebuilt and serviced because, with so much money at stake, no one wanted to hold the shooting up with any form of delay; even a 35-year-old ex-Soviet Army tank breaking down would be no excuse.

However, Jean Paul Pallud, our French military historian, explains that 'there were certainly no Tigers in this part of Normandy. Schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 101 — the first Tiger unit to reach the invasion front — did not arrive until June 12 when those tanks that survived the six-day journey from Beauvais went into action at Villers-Bocage [see our new book *Villers-Bocage Through the Lens*]. The only German armour in this part of Normandy would have been the 1940-vintage captured French tanks of Panzer-Abteiling 100.'

Alan Tomkins: 'One of my favourite vehicles of the period is the German Kettenkrad 'tracked motorbike' so with the help of Dale Dye, we managed to work one into the final chase scenes when the choreography was mapped out around the French town. All told, Steve Lamonby supplied five Kettenkrads *(left)*; 12 BMW motorcyles with sidecar and machine gun (only three used); an Opel Blitz radio van and Opel Blitz truck with drop-side body; a Horch staff car; Mercedes staff car; five Kübelwagens (but only one used); two Steyr troop carriers; a Mercedes L3000 troop carrier; a Praga 6-wheel truck; a Mercedes L4500A heavy truck; two

Hanomag Sd.Kfz 251 half-tracks; and two Panzer 38 Marders which Steve found in Czechoslovakia, one with original WWII shell damage. On the Allied side, we had five Harley-Davidson motorcycles although none actually used; nine Jeeps; five Dodge Command Cars (two used); five Dodge Weapons Carriers (three used); three Dodge staff cars; 20 GMC 6-wheelers; two Dodge ambulances and two White half-tracks. I had also spent a lot of time preparing drawings for the large exhaust stacks for fitting onto the rear of the two Shermans *(right)* although shots of them landing were cut from the final film.'

'Now with time running out we had to select which gliders to start building. Having already tracked down all the drawings and research we had on Horsas for *A Bridge Too Far,* I was really disappointed to learn that the script dictated that American Wacos were required for the crashed glider field scenes but this was really inevitable bearing in mind the Horsa was basically a British-operated machine. As with the Tiger tank, a full-size Waco was available to photograph and measure at the Museum of Army Flying at Middle Wallop. They kindly gave us permission and were very helpful with other reference on gliders, etc. We were fortunate that, unlike *A Bridge Too Far* where the Horsas had to appear in scenes both complete in towing mode and later crashed, with *Saving Private Ryan* we only needed them to appear in a wrecked state.

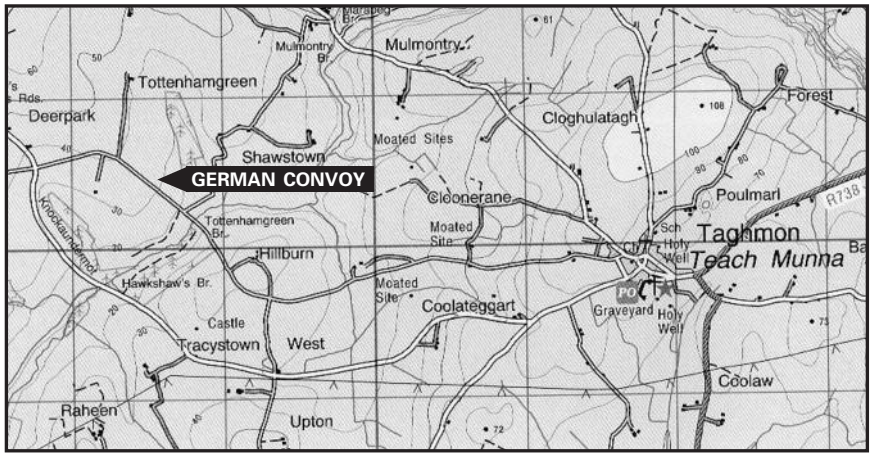
'We set them up in a corner of Hatfield airfield amidst a forest of anti-glider landing poles ('Rommel's Asparagus' to give them their nickname) as if they had just crash-landed and we had great fun smashing the noses in by running a small bulldozer into them. This gave them the 'natural' look necessary to portray the usually overloaded gliders having hit the ground at 70 mph. Tearing the doped canvas proved much more difficult as it would only tear vertically or horizontally so, even with my trusty Swiss Army pocket knife, it was difficult to make the canvas sides look naturally damaged. One crashed glider, complete with a smashed Jeep inside, was mocked up based on a real-life incident in which Brigadier General Don Pratt, the Assistant Divisional Commander of the 101st Airborne Division, was killed. The General had ridden into the battle sitting in his Jeep and when the Waco crash-landed, his helmeted head hit the roof of the glider, breaking his neck. (See *D-Day Then and Now,* Volume 1, page 305.)

The glider landing field was also located at Hatfield in a corner of the airfield to the north of the village set (see rear cover). Here, Alan placed six Waco replicas amid a maze of anti-landing obstacles. The gliders were then deliberately damaged to simulate them having struck the posts.

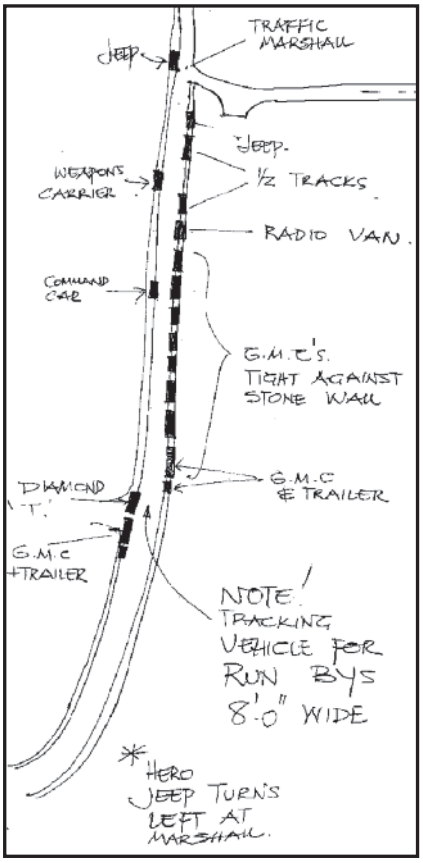
One smashed Waco was positioned right in the trees. This contained a Jeep and a grisly dead body to mimic the real-life accident which befell the Assistant Divisional Commander of the 101st.

One of the major departures from the script was the elimination of the idea that Miller's squad use a Jeep to look for Ryan. Dale Dye explains: 'We spent some production time filming the action and dialogue with the rescue squad in a standard WWII Willys Jeep pulling a trailer which made room for all principals involved. These scenes were primarily designed to develop the background of the characters and provide ample opportunity for them to discuss the rights and/or wrongs of the mission. The only action involved came when they were forced to motor across a critical crossroads which was registered by German 88s. The Jeep drives off the road, gets stuck and the troops try to unditch while under incoming arty fire. At this point, the squad is left afoot. All this we got on film . . . and then Steven got a look at it in the editing room. He later told me the entire sequence tended to slow down the action and the dialogue covered points that were adequately covered elsewhere in the film. He decided to cut and keep the pacing of the film at a fairly fast clip.' *Left:* **Alan had prepared three matching Jeeps for this sequence as insurance against breakdowns. The action included blowing up a couple of trucks which Neil Corbould, the special effects explosives expert, accomplished late one evening for real in Thame Park.** *Right:* **A slip of the film editor's scissors leaves in this brief image at the very end of the D+3 wide shot of the beach in which we see Miller and his men 'exuent right' in the Jeep; the next scene showing them walking on foot across the fields!**

'Incidentally, it had been originally intended that a lot of action would take place with Tom Hanks driving a Jeep, so three matching vehicles had to be prepared with new canvas hoods and seats, etc. Mike Stallwood of RR Motor Services Ltd came up with all the Jeep requirements we made on him over a period of three months. However, what I had never seen reproduced in any film about D-Day were the breather exhaust pipes for deep wading when leaving the landing craft. These were duly made up and added to all the smaller vehicles for the beach landing scenes. Sadly though, the Jeep scenes were cut from the final film.'



Included in the same Jeep ride sequence was an incident when they drive past a shot-up German convoy. This was staged in Ireland at Taghmon (pronounced Tamon) on the stretch of road near Tottenhamgreen Bridge. The motorbike and sidecar is the same old Czech machine that was seen blowing up in the film *Hanover Street.* The same bike also appears at the end of the film on the bridge as Miller dies.



As Alan had to leave Ireland for Hatfield before the scene was shot, he prepared this plan to show where the vehicles had to be placed on the road. This footage would have been inter-cut with that shot in Thame Park. As this whole scenario was dropped, one must hope that it will one day be included in a 'director's cut' version of the film.

With thousands of nit-picking military buffs looking for mistakes, Simon Atherton had great courage in — literally — sticking to his guns over Miller and other men protecting their weapons with plastic bags *(left).* **Spielberg believed that plastic bags had not been invented in 1944 but there is written and photographic evidence to prove Simon correct. Pfc John Barnet of Company A, 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry, records that 'our rifles were wrapped in a protective cellophane wrapper with an inflated tube to keep them afloat'.** *Right:* **And look at this picture taken on D-Day aboard a US Coast Guard vessel.**

THE WEAPONS

It was Simon Atherton's job as the film's Armourer to assemble and maintain the small arms. 'We used approximately 500 practical weapons', says Simon, 'which included 200 M1 Garands and 96 K98k rifles, 36 M1 carbines (including some paratrooper models), 15 Thompson SMGs, 15 Browning Automatic Rifles, 5 MG34s, 15 MG42s, 15 MP40s, 2 .50 Brownings, 8 .30 Brownings, plus Luger, P38 and Colt pistols, as well as bazookas, mortars, grenades and other such items. We also became involved with the explosives, supplying German and American grenades, and also bangalore torpedoes, fuses, pole charges and the sticky bombs (we still haven't got our socks back!!).

'The guns originated from Korea, Belgium, Germany and Czechoslovakia, being brought together in this country, the blanks coming mainly from the USA. We did have problems sourcing M1A1 bazookas and, in the end, as we could not find real ones, we manufactured them to the original design. Other than those, we used the type of weapons that would have been used in the actual Omaha Beach landings. In addition to the practical weapons, we had approximately 1,200 rubber copies made.

'Before filming started, we had to convert the weapons to fire blanks, have them proofed. We also had to obtain special dispensation from the Home Office and Hertfordshire Constabulary, from whom we had excellent co-operation, in order to set up an armoury at the Hatfield location to enable such a large number of weapons to be held in one location.

'My role on the film, when I was approached, was to do the preliminary breakdown of the script in order to work out how many weapons would be needed, to prepare a budget, and explain how I would manage the logistics of the whole thing. This involved a lot of research into what type of weapons would be needed and where they could be sourced, plus liaison with the various departments on the film, especially the Art Department, Special Effects and Stunts, to tie in with what they were doing. When we were given the go-ahead, I got my rubber copies, dummies, etc. that would be needed, not to mention all the webbing for the GIs' uniforms. As some of the shooting was done in Eire, I also had to liaise with the Irish Government and the Department of Trade and Industry in order to obtain the necessary permissions to export, albeit temporarily, a large number of weapons to Ireland, which as you can imagine was fairly complicated.

'Once shooting actually started, the job I had, with my team, was to make sure that we were ready to supply all the weapons that would be needed for each day's filming at the right time and in the right place. We had to be organised — when you have a couple of hundred extras lined up, wanting to be equipped with weapons, blanks, etc., ready to be on set by 8 a.m., you need to be! With such a large number of extras, this did involve some careful planning as to how we were going to account for each weapon, so a system of signing them in and out was developed which ensured that nothing went missing. This was not always easy, especially with some of the beach scenes, when a lot of weapons ended up in the sea or covered in sand. All these had to be stripped down and cleaned each night ready for the next day but, thanks to a great team (including outstanding support from the five armourers supplied by the Irish military), we usually managed to get home in time to make the last half hour before closing time!

'Security for the weapons in Ireland was, as you can imagine, of paramount importance, with a special compound being built to house them whilst there, and two detectives from the Wexford Garda assigned for permanent duty with us.

'From my point of view, *Saving Private Ryan* was the biggest film I have ever worked on, in terms of numbers of weapons used and, in all, we used in excess of a million rounds of blank ammunition during the filming. It is very difficult to make any film be completely and absolutely accurate as far as weapons are concerned, because 100 per cent accurately would have been the day itself, but in this one we were very, very close, with both the Director and myself being more than happy with the result.'

Another controversy concerns Upham *(left)* **carrying .30 machine-gun cloth belts around his neck. Lieutenant Colonel Mike Stratton, ex-3rd Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry (Ryan is also 506th — a fellow 'Currahee') says that 'in WWII, the M1919A4, M1919A6, and the M1917A1 machine guns used two types of ammo belts: the cloth type and the metal-link type. The metal-link type was preferred because it was a lot less prone to damage. The cloth belts were notorious for stretching out of shape which required a large tolerance in the feed mechanism of the gun to prevent a jam. Carrying the cloth belts 'Pancho Villa' style was a disaster waiting to happen. If the cloth belts got wet or muddy, or the GI who was carrying them caught them on brush or inadvertently stepped on one end, the belt could deform by stretching which would invariably lead to a jam. In addition, carrying the cloth belts over your shoulder could result in lost rounds and we can see them falling out of Upham's in one shot'.** *Right:* **But again contemporary photographic evidence proves otherwise so Simon stands vindicated, although cartridges with primers should have been used, not dummy rounds.**

A parade of the LCMs and LCVPs off Ballinesker beach during a break in filming of the assault on Omaha.

OMAHA AT WEXFORD

'I was approached by the production as to whether we could locate period landing craft for the film', writes Robin Davies of Square Sail. 'By coincidence I happened to be working in America on another project and, following up a few old contacts, I managed to locate ten landing craft in a scrapyard (just below Bob Hope's house) in Palm Springs. These were ideal vessels as they were ex-Vietnam, but identical to World War II and probably made from the same moulds. All the vessels were in a state of disrepair but basically complete. The original engines were there although some were in bits with others having some pieces missing.

'We did a survey on all the craft and purchased in the States a 'shopping list' of all the spare parts needed. These craft were packaged and transported across from Palm Springs to the Eastern Seaboard by road where they were then shipped by container in their own specially-made cradles to Felixstowe docks. They were then transported to Charlestown Harbour in Cornwall which is the Square Sail shipyard base. We immediately put a dozen of our engineers on them full time, rebuilding the craft completely with working engines and all original equipment. They were then painted with the appropriate registration numbers and, together with two English-built landing craft which had been restored by James Wakefield, the whole flotilla was transported to Wexford, Ireland.

'The Wexford beach location had been decided on after a number of recces by one of the Location Managers, Alex Gladstone, and the Associate Producer, Kevin de la Noy. It was ideal, not dissimilar to Omaha and offering a large sandy area of about 3-4 miles long with soft grass-clad cliff running down to the beach. The whole action took place on the beach area which was covered in 'hedgehogs' and other defence systems placed by the Art Department.

'As there were no facilities at Wexford, we built a small modular marina which became the working base for the operation of the 12 landing craft plus one large Russian tank landing craft (which we hired in from Scotland). The support facilities we incorporated for the operation were as follows: 12 divers with high speed RIBs [rubber inflatable boats]; four support work vessels (for carrying equipment and personnel); one large luxury support yacht, and three camera vessels. In the end, the whole marine department ended up with a total complement of approximately 80 personnel. This included myself as overall Marine Co-ordinator for the operation; Alistair Rumball, our Safety Officer; and a group of ex-Marines from Poole whom we brought in as coxswains and crew to operate the landing craft.

'I was very fortunate when we purchased these landing craft in Palm Springs to acquire an original landing craft manual of Second War vintage. We used this to design and structure the whole operation on the landings for Steven Spielberg. In fact, we followed the World War II programme exactly with the landing craft approaching the beach in echelon at 1,000 metres, then going to full speed for the last 500 metres. This produced

Omaha then . . . Omaha now. *Above:* **In this contemporary D-Day shot, we even see a rifle protected by a plastic bag just to the right of the ramp.** *Below:* **Steven Spielberg's shocking opening sequence as the 2nd Rangers take the full brunt of enemy fire. One of Simon's protected rifles can be seen on the left.**

waves of landing craft coming in parallel or in 'V' formation or diagonal formation, depending on the Director's requirements. Once beached with the troops discharged, the landing craft then reversed out and circled to clear the beach and the action area.

'It was a fairly complex operation because we had to run the landing craft in railway grid fashion which was to keep them clear of the 50-metre spacings of the underwater mines and explosions which were laid by Special Effects. Each landing craft carried around 30 troops and on hitting the beach the ramps went down and they then cleared the vessel and ran ashore. The big problem we experienced was that the crew, once they had jumped into the water at waist depth, were obviously wet and it was therefore impractical to reboard them on the landing craft which were aground a few metres off the beach. We therefore built a floating jetty in plastic which we ran off the beach just out of shot. This was approximately 300 metres long and became a working jetty for loading and unloading troops, support vessels and the landing craft, and it turned out to be very effective.

'Our base camp at Wexford, which was the Marine Operations Centre itself, carried four engineers, and the administration and service department. The vessels, as they came in from a day's operation, were serviced, checked, cleaned and refuelled for the following morning.

'A normal day began at 5.30 a.m. when, after briefing, the men boarded the boats to proceed to the beach location, along with the support vessels and any equipment necessary. The engineers went by road to be on standby while filming took place.

'The actual Marine Co-ordination was covered using mobile radios working on two channels allocated to the Marine Department. One channel covered safety and the other the operations. This set-up usually involved me standing next to the Art Directors, cameras, and the Director, with one of the coxswains probably operational on the beach. The radio links would then go directly to the landing craft coxswains bringing the vessels in and they were instructed by radio to time sequences with the camera rolls for action shots.

'The large Russian landing craft was fitted with a dummy tank and this was normally operational in the background and, on some occasions, it actually came onto the beach. We did a number of shots covering beach landings, activities on the beach and coming in under full power. We also did other takes in fairly heavy weather showing the action of the crews and soldiers going through rough sea conditions. In addition, we brought in specialist catamaran camera boats to take Steadicam and crane equipment so we could capture good shots. I also used a defunct landing craft without an engine which was principally a 'blow up' unit. This was anchored a couple of hundred metres off the beach and was blown up at the appropriate time while the rest of the landing craft were coming through.

'Once the troops had landed on the beach, our responsibilities ended. I was very impressed with the way Steven Spielberg worked and the whole concept allowed the Heads of Departments like myself to use our initiative and research to produce a realistic series of action sequences.

'The main shooting scenes of the beach and landings were covered by five cameras and everything was rehearsed before the action took place.

'The weather conditions during the filming were generally good, other than one day when we had a large swell running which caused some problems. Generally, the whole operation ran very efficiently and the risk assessment (which I assembled) covering the activity proved correct and we had no accidents or injuries at all.

'The whole film period on location was approximately six weeks and on completion of filming we cleared the beach of the jetties, dismantled the harbour and facilities built at Wexford and sold the landing craft off to one or two scrap dealers in England and other interested parties.'

The filming of some of the landing sequences lasted in excess of five minutes and were covered by five cameras. Even so, this extensively choreographed action, before the craft touch down, lasts only a brief 100 seconds on the screen.

The daily ritual of preparing the vessels at Wexford harbour. A couple of the American LCVPs had different codes on each side to increase the numbers for filming.

Neill Gorton and Steve Painter are experts in manufacturing death in all its awful forms. *Left:* **A clay sculpture of a member of Gorton & Painter FX Ltd prior to moulding.** *Right:* **Fake urethane 'background' heads ready to be mated with bodies.**

STUNTS & SPECIAL FX

Early on, Steven Spielberg decided that deaths in *Ryan* should be portrayed accurately and not in the accentuated manner which Hollywood film-makers have adopted in recent years. When struck by a bullet people drop to the ground and are not suddenly blown backwards, jerked by the wires of a stunt technician. To this end, Simon Crane, the Stunt Coordinator; Neil Corbould, the Special Effects Supervisor; and Neill Gorton and Steve Painter, the 'Corpse' Designers, worked closely together to make death and dying as realistic as possible.

Gorton & Painter FX Ltd were commissioned to produce 100 'dead' for the Omaha scenes of which 50 were to be for background dressing, 25 for floating corpses and 25 'heroes'. In addition, there were to be five dead Normandy cows and three working horses. Never before had so many lifelike dummies been produced . . . and there were just a few months allowed to do the job.

Full body casts were made of members of Gordon & Painter's staff using alginate dental moulding material. As this would normally be floppy, it was backed up with plaster bandage. Into this mould was poured melted Plastina — a kind of plasticine. For the 'hero' bodies which would be seen in close-up, the moulding was done using a silicon material.

As far as the animals were concerned, the Production Designer decreed at the outset that real animals were not to be used (nor real skins) so these beasts were sculpted in wet clay over an armature. A hollow fibreglass mould was then prepared which was filled with polyurethane foam to which fake fur was attached.

At least ten bodies were blown apart in explosions (which were Neil Corbould's responsibility) and some corpses were recovered from the beach to be redressed for subsequent scenes like the cut German convoy sequence where bodies, some burned, were strewn over vehicles, in the road, and up in trees. 'Executed' Germans were also provided and others (also not seen in the film) were scattered around the casemated gun on the beach.

Another part of the special effects work concerned ten amputees whom Steven Spielberg employed to represent maimed wounded. The men were fitted with silicon limbs complete with ragged flesh, to replace those already lost, which could then be blown off.

Just two weeks before shooting started in Thame Park, near Oxford, Spielberg then got the idea to incorporate three paratroop corpses which had been bloated by being out in the sun for a week. G&P consulted their forensic text books and showed the director the different ways that bodies deteriorated when left unburied and the three dummies were painted up accordingly.

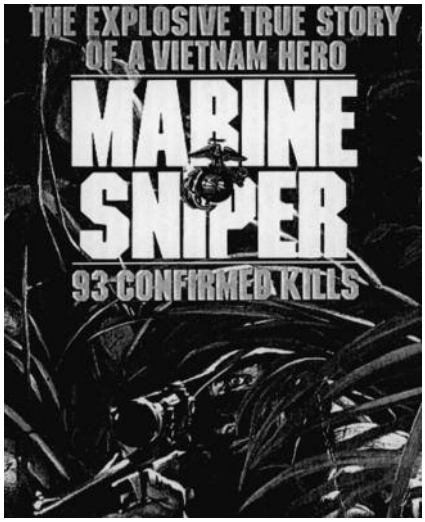
Above: **The bloated paratrooper corpses — made of silicone but horribly life-like — seen briefly at the beginning of the battle for the radar station.** *Below:* **Five Normandy cows and three horses were fabricated from foam covered with fake fur. A dead horse is seen in the first battle in the rain and cows near the radar position.**

Setting up for scenes 21-25 *(left)* **leading to the assault on the sandbagged emplacement on the hilltop (scenes 27-29)** *(right)*. **Neil Corbould wants particularly to pay tribute to Trevor Wood, who looked after the FX workshop and props for him, and to Clive Beard, his Floor Effects Supervisor, who had much to do in liaising the explosive special effects with the Director.**

Not all the bodies were full size. For example, the German machine gunner hit in the sand-bagged nest on the beach by the sniper's bullet was a half-size, waist up puppet sitting on the back of Neil Corbould whose hands were operating the gun.

Another 'gag' (as it is called in film jargon) was to replace an actor or stunt man with a dummy just before being hit or blown up. But in the case of the GI on the beach shot through the head after he removes his helmet, a plate was glued to the stunt man's (Derek Lea) forehead with a squib on top which was covered with a piece of foam latex blended in with his skin. Neil Corbould then fixed a 2-inch air 'mortar' on the man's back filled with pieces of latex, hair and simulated blood. An electric wire blew the squib on his forehead and a millisecond later the mortar ejected its contents to make it look as if the bullet had blown the back off of his head.

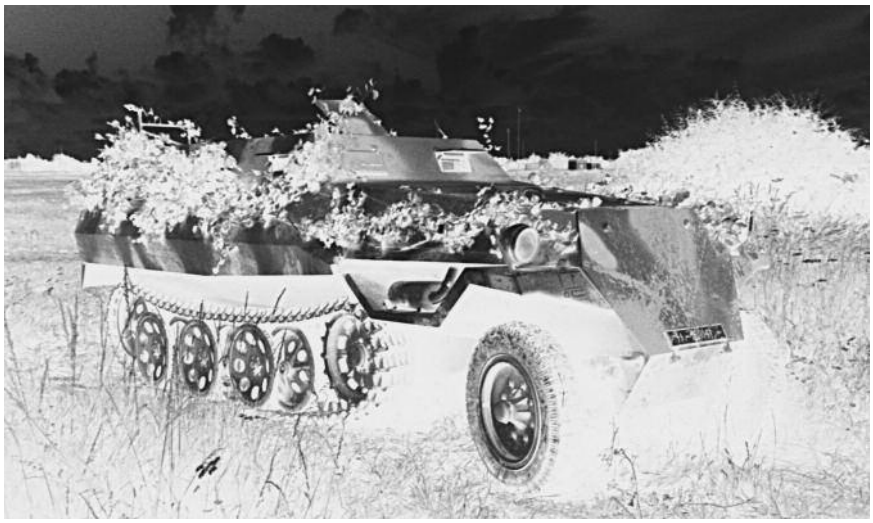
It was Neil's brother Ian who worked out the variation where the German sniper is shot in the tower. Steven Spielberg was all prepared to create the hit with computer graphics back in Hollywood but Ian knew that they could do it for 'real'. A special 'appliance' comprising a dummy eye, squib and protective plate was fitted on the back of the telescopic sight which itself had been specially prepared by cutting out its side and covering the opening with silver foil and glitter and replacing the lens with sugar-glass. A solenoid-operated air cannon containing blood was also fitted to his back. Then, as the sniper (stunt man Leos Stransky) raised his rifle and put the scope to his eye, the appliance adhered and covered his actual eye. A squib in the sight was then detonated, blowing out the side, synchronised with the hit in the eye and spray of blood from behind his head. The sniper shot worked perfectly first take, much to Steven Spielberg's satisfaction.



According to Marty Black, who saw the film soon after its premiere in Hollywood on July 21, 1998, 'the German-sniper-shot-through-the-scope was apparently Captain Dye's tribute to VN marine sniper Sergeant Carlos Hatchcock. According to his biography *Marine Sniper* by Charles Henderson, Hatchcock reportedly did this once in Vietnam.

The squibs that Neil used were US-made 'Asprodets' in varying strengths made of lead azide — an explosive which produces very little smoke — and in all 17,000 were used on the film. Some were detonated manually, others by computer or radio control. The latter method was, Neil believes, a 'first' as Spielberg wanted to synchronise the firing of a gun with a 'hit' on a man. Neil achieved this by linking the radio control button to the trigger of the gun although great care had to be taken to use a frequency not already being used by the many walkie-talkies and other mobiles on the set.

Before filming started, Neil and his team watched hours of wartime video to see how vehicles really react when hit. This led to the elimination of the usual Hollywood fireball because this was seen not to be typical of the wartime footage. Only when the landing craft gets blown up, the half-track gets hit by the bazooka, and in the Molotov cocktail attack in the final battle was the flame effect used, the flame being propane gas.



The sequence where the German half-track is knocked out was filmed in a field at the back of the airfield. The front armour plate was replaced with MDF board prepared with a primacord explosive charge set off by the driver. Neil warned us to watch this shot carefully as it is filmed all by one camera without any cutting, and with his unique radio-controlled hits. The complete clip lasts 1 minute 40 seconds — very long by normal standards — and ends with the discovery of Private James Francis Ryan.

To prepare for the huge explosions on the beach, Neil did much testing on the Shoeburyness range in Essex to determine how close he could place an actor to a charge. Delta 100 — a slurry explosive not as strong as dynamite but which gives a lot of lift with less noise — was used, and at one point Tom Hanks is just 20 metres from a 2½kg HE charge.

However, in the main, the beach 'explosions' in which stunt men or dummies are blown up were created using huge air cannon sunk in the sand. These were cylinders 8 feet long and 3 feet diameter, with a 6-inch flange topped by a cone measuring 5 feet in diameter. This was filled with water and sieved sand. When the air under pressure was suddenly released by a solenoid valve, a spectacular 'explosion' resulted but one which stunt man could stand on top of without receiving an injury. All told, eight of the pressure vessels were sunk in the beach, used with particular dramatic effect when one of the amputee stunt men has a leg blown off.

To simulate bullet hits in the sand, detonators were wired together and marked with red tape. Then after the actors had thoroughly rehearsed the action, the tape was removed for filming. For strikes underwater, a huge spider's web of air piping was laid out with a solenoid valve at the end of each leg. A length of rubber hose on each prevented someone from being hurt if they accidentally stepped on the end. Also, using air meant a quick reset time whereas wired explosives would have been very difficult to replace speedily.

One shot that Neil is particularly pleased with is when the building collapses from a tank hit during the final battle in the town. In this case, the front wall at the first and second floor level was built of soda brick (which crumbles easily) resting on retractable plates. Then, when the linked explosives outside the building were set off, the plates were retracted, causing the whole structure to collapse on cue.

Left: **Filming the beach scenes began on Monday, July 29.** *Right:* **The large explosions were created using huge air cylinders sunk in the sand. When the air was suddenly released, a dramatic, yet safe, explosive effect was created with little danger to Simon Crane's stunt men.** *Below:* **Some of the most dramatic stunts involved flame**

Simon Crane used over 40 people during the filming from his international stunt team — 'the best in the world', he says — having recently been employed on the epic film *Titanic.* These days, Equity, the acting union, demands that a stunt man must be proficient at instructor level in six different sports and have five years' supervised training on the job before being allowed to perform solo. Simon says that *Private Ryan* was probably the most difficult film he has worked on because Steven Spielberg wanted everything to appear absolutely real; *Ryan* achieved a level of realism unlike the normal Hollywood action movie in which stunts are seen to be just that.

Probably the most horrific sequences Simon had to co-ordinate were those incorporating flame — when the landing craft explodes setting fire to the men aboard, and when the pillbox is burned out with a flamethrower. In both cases, a 'device' is used to keep the outer body temperature of the stunt man down for a brief period before the flame gel is extinguished.

Stunt doubles were provided for all the actors (Mark Henson was the stand in for Tom Hanks) but in the event the doubles were not used.

The drowning sequences were filmed in a 70ft x 30ft 'pond' dug at Hatfield. Lined with butyl and containing a false section of landing craft, stunt men and corpses were filmed using an underwater camera. Ball bearings produced the bullet trace effect while squibs were set off to release the blood.

Safety was a primary concern to Spielberg and his entire production team. With that in mind, Neil worked closely with the Director and with Simon to establish the exact placement of the actors and stunt people with regard to the rigged explosions. 'Steven is very safety conscious', says Neil, and 'he encouraged me or Simon to tell him when we felt something was not safe, and was quite happy to alter the shot or do whatever it took to make it safe.'

Duncan Jarman and Anthony Parker (make up FX) in the water tank dug on the airfield. Note the false piece of landing craft.

With some of his previous films, Steven Spielberg has left himself open to what has been called 'Spielbergian manipulation' for 'hitting strategic emotional targets'. As he says: 'I can be manipulative and devilish when it comes to big entertainment movies. I've done that all my career. But something like this, where there's so much chaos and confusion on a beach and you're being fired upon from three different directions and people are dying and you're trying to find some refuge from all that murderous crossfire, everything's a surprise. I didn't use any special effects or technology to instil any kind of unease in the audience. I simply took a camera the way a Signal Corps combat cameraman would shoot an actual event unfolding before his eyes. I made the whole movie basically as a member of the Signal Corps.'

COMBAT FOOTAGE

To contribute to a heightened sense of realism which he had noted and admired with the wartime combat footage in John Huston's *The Battle of San Pietro* (see *After the Battle* videocassette No. 3), Spielberg wanted to take an almost documentarian approach to filming *Ryan.* He did not do any advance storyboarding, in which the camera angles are pre-planned prior to shooting, and used hand-held cameras much of the time. 'In that way, I was able to hit the sets much like a newsreel cameraman following soldiers into war', he explains.

To achieve a tone and quality that was not only true to the story, but reflected the period in which it is set, Spielberg once again collaborated with Janusz Kaminski who had carried out the award-winning black-and-white cinematography on *Schlinder's List.* 'Early on, we both knew that we did not want this to look like a technicolor extravaganza about World War II, but more like colour newsreel footage from the 1940s, which is highly desaturated, very grainy and extremely low-tech', Spielberg says.

Kaminski had the protective coating removed from the camera lenses making them closer to those used in the 1940s. 'Without the coating', Kaminski explains, 'the light goes in and starts bouncing around which makes it slightly more diffused and a bit softer without being out of focus'. The overall effect was then enhanced — or rather de-enhanced — by putting the negative through an additional process that extracted more of the colour.

Another camera technique Kaminski applied was reverting to 90-degree shutters, or even 45-degree shutters for many of the battle sequences, as opposed to today's standard of 180-degree shutters. This effect increases the exposure as the shutter does not completely close the lense. He explains: 'In this way, we attained a certain staccato in the actors' movements and a certain crispness in the explosions, which makes them slightly more realistic'.

Robert Capa in 1944 . . . Steven Spielberg in 1997. Memorable D-Day images — then and now.

Continuity panorama for scene 40 — the D+3 sequence in which the balloons and mass of shipping were later matted on in the studio.

Spielberg was unflinching in his desire to depict the Omaha landing as it really happened. 'Omaha Beach was a slaughter', he says. 'It was a complete foul-up: from the expeditionary forces, to the reconnaissance forces, to the saturation bombing that missed most of its primary targets. Given that, I didn't want to glamorise what had really happened, so I tried to be as brutally honest as I could.'

After all the planning, preparations and rehearsals, the attention to authenticity down to the last detail paid off. When Spielberg called 'Action' on Monday, July 29, the cast could not help but feel transported from a movie set to an event which had taken place over half a century before.

Tom Hanks is quoted as saying that 'the adrenalin rush was like nothing I had ever experienced on any other movie because it was chaos as soon as you stepped out there. There were people falling and explosions going off around you, and it was not hard to imagine that the carnage was real, that it was caused by bullets and mortars and shells. There's terror in our eyes in some of those scenes, and rightly so, because we were genuinely scared . . . and we knew that it was all fake.'

Edward Burns adds: 'I'm really glad we shot the D-Day invasion at the beginning of the schedule because it changed the way we looked at every scene that followed it. Nobody was prepared for how horrific it really was, and you really got a sense of what those guys went through.'

'Being out there on the Irish Sea in those boats gave me a sensation of what it must have been like for those men', says Barry Pepper. 'My mind started to wander and I began to think about how afraid they must have been. They were so tired and soaking wet, and then they stepped off the boats and saw their pals dying all around them, and all they could do was crawl up those beaches.'

Robert Rodat, the screenwriter, says that 'the miracle of D-Day was that in the chaos of the invasion, with the generals far away and most of the plans having gone awry, small groups of privates and non-coms and mid-level officers took the initiative and, at terrible personal risk, did what needed to be done.'

Steven Spielberg has a penchant for on-set improvisation and often changed or included things at the last moment, like the scene when fear overcomes Corporal Upham as he climbs the staircase just as the German Waffen-SS soldier (stunt man Mac Steinmeier) kills Private Mellish with a bayonet while whispering in his ear: 'It's easier for you, much easier.'

'There were a lot of things that weren't in the script that just seemed natural discoveries', says Spielberg. At one point, Captain Miller was supposed to launch into a long juicy speech — a monologue any actor would kill to have because my character finally got to drop the mantle of a quiet captain who erects an iron shield around his private life. But I didn't want to drop the mantle. If you have that moment where we're going to let our hair down, it would just cheapen the character and compromise the integrity of who he is throughout the entire movie'.

Several scenes were shot which do not appear in the final film, one of the most dramatic alterations mentioned earlier being to cut the whole scripted scenario where Captain Miller and his men travel by Jeep to look for Ryan. The film brochure actually shows them leaving the beach aboard the Jeep and trailer and this shot appears very briefly in the wide D+3 shot of the beach. But the follow-on scene of the Jeep passing burning German transport and approaching an ambushed US convoy ended on the cutting room floor.

Several letters of complaint were received by the British Board of Film Classification from parents whose offspring had been upset on seeing the film. Michael Vizard, one of the two examiners who originally viewed the film for certification, explains that 'We would expect people, young and old, to be shocked; that is one of its purposes. It is the role of art in all its forms to hold up the mirror to life, reflecting both beauty and horror. However, we were confident that the film would not cause *harm* to the young people of this age group who choose to see it (many will exercise their own judgement and stay away, as reasonable judges of their own capacities and tolerances). One of the principal factors in our decision [for the '15' classification] was the integrity of the film-making in avoiding any suggestion of prurience. There is no prurient dwelling on the horror. The horror has to be there in order to achieve authenticity (or reality); however, the camera never intrudes on suffering, on wounds and death; it never invites *us* to intrude, and certainly not to indulge in any sadistic voyeurism. Related to this, we felt that the horror and violence (indeed, the whole war milieu portrayal) were entirely justified by the context, both the characters and the narrative: these are men and events in war situations. The Board has to exercise judgement in relation to our standards in order to achieve a consistency of service to the public and to the industry. In the case of *Private Ryan,* we were confident that the film posed no potential harm to young people, especially given the factors which I have spelt out above. On the contrary, we felt that young people should not be deprived of the right to see the film since, in our view, it has much to offer them. It provides an experience, an approximation — within a safe environment — of war (and a historical one in which Britain was one of the principal protagonists): the reality and horror, the actual effects and consequences, the hideousness of the moral conflicts. It also provides strong role models of courage, compassion and loyalty. It was therefore the unanimous view of the examiners that the film should be made available to 15 year olds. That being said, *Ryan* would certainly have never been released without cuts and an X certificate before the 1980s.'

Jean Paul Pallud viewed the film with his usual eye for detail. He comments that the geographical locations given in the film are a mixture of fact and fiction. And he adds: 'While there are over 40 towns or villages named "Neuville" in France, there are only three in Normandy. And there is certainly no village called "Ramelle". There are two signs seen in the town, one points left to Périers and the other right to Cherbourg. This would therefore indicate that the square at the end of the bridge is on the west bank of the river, i.e. Périers to the south and Cherbourg to the north. Consequently, it is accurate to see German infantry attacking from this bank. Not so logical, however, is the fact that the Rangers (who should have arrived from the east) seem to arrive from this same western end of the town when they join with the paratroopers. On the other hand, the fact that they have just knocked out an SS half-track would indicate that, although we did not see them cross, they were already on the "enemy" side of the river.'

Another interesting departure from the script is the inclusion of the Abraham Lincoln letter, read so eloquently by General Marshall. Captain Dye, who appears in this scene as the white-haired colonel, tells us that the letter was real. 'Lincoln sent it during the American Civil War after he was informed of tragic combat losses from a single family in the north. It was a last-minute addition directly from the mind of Steven Spielberg. Where he got the notion or how he became familiar with the Lincoln letter I do not know. I suspect someone pointed it out to him and he simply decided it was so powerful he had to use it. I recall he was very proud of it. The inclusion of yours truly as General Marshall's aide-de-camp was not specifically an impromptu notion. Spielberg has long been familiar with my work as an actor. He hired me to act in one of his earlier films, *Always.* I am not without experience or notoriety as a performer having been in about 30 films now. Spielberg simply said to me on set one day: 'You've given so much to this film; we've got to find a way to get you into it.'

The noted D-Day historian and author Stephen E. Ambrose is billed as the historical consultant on *Saving Private Ryan* although he was never 'consulted' as such. It was his books which were used as source material, in fact he had no idea that he was the film's historic consultant until DreamWorks invited him to see the finished film!

'The search for Private Ryan is fiction but of the kind that illuminates truth rather than diminishes it', says Ambrose. 'Everything about the story is accurate to the smallest detail: clothes, weapons, language, relationships between men who trained together and newcomers, and between officers and enlisted men. The movie catches these nuances exactly. It is, without question, the most accurate and realistic depiction of war on screen that I have ever seen, not only in terms of the action, but the actors look, act, talk, walk, bitch, argue and love one another exactly as the GIs they are pretending to be did in 1944.'

'Making a war movie isn't glamorous to me', Spielberg reflects. 'My dad brought home stories of the war, and he always explained to me how unglamorous war is. What I tried to do in this film was approximate the look and the sounds and even the smells of what combat is really like.'

Tom Hanks believes: 'I think it's very important to communicate to an audience that mere mortals — flesh and blood human beings — had to be called upon to make this sort of sacrifice. And, in that way, I think we are doing a bit of a service to them . . . not through a history lesson, but through a humanity lesson.'

September 12, 1997, and the film crew arrive at Normandy Military Cemetery to shoot the opening and closing sequences. The dummy headstone of the fictitious Captain Miller was significantly placed in front of Plot F where the Niland brothers are interred along with the 1,010 D-Day burials (or missing commemorated) in Omaha cemetery today. Even more amazingly, when the film crew read the name on the headstone in the front row immediately behind their own, they could not believe their eyes: Sergeant Richard F. Miller from Pennsylvania. It was almost as if it was meant to be . . . an amazing coincidence with John H. Miller, the school-teacher also from Pennsylvania, providing a perfect link between 1944 and the present day.

THE BATTLE FOR St SAUVEUR-LE-VICOMTE

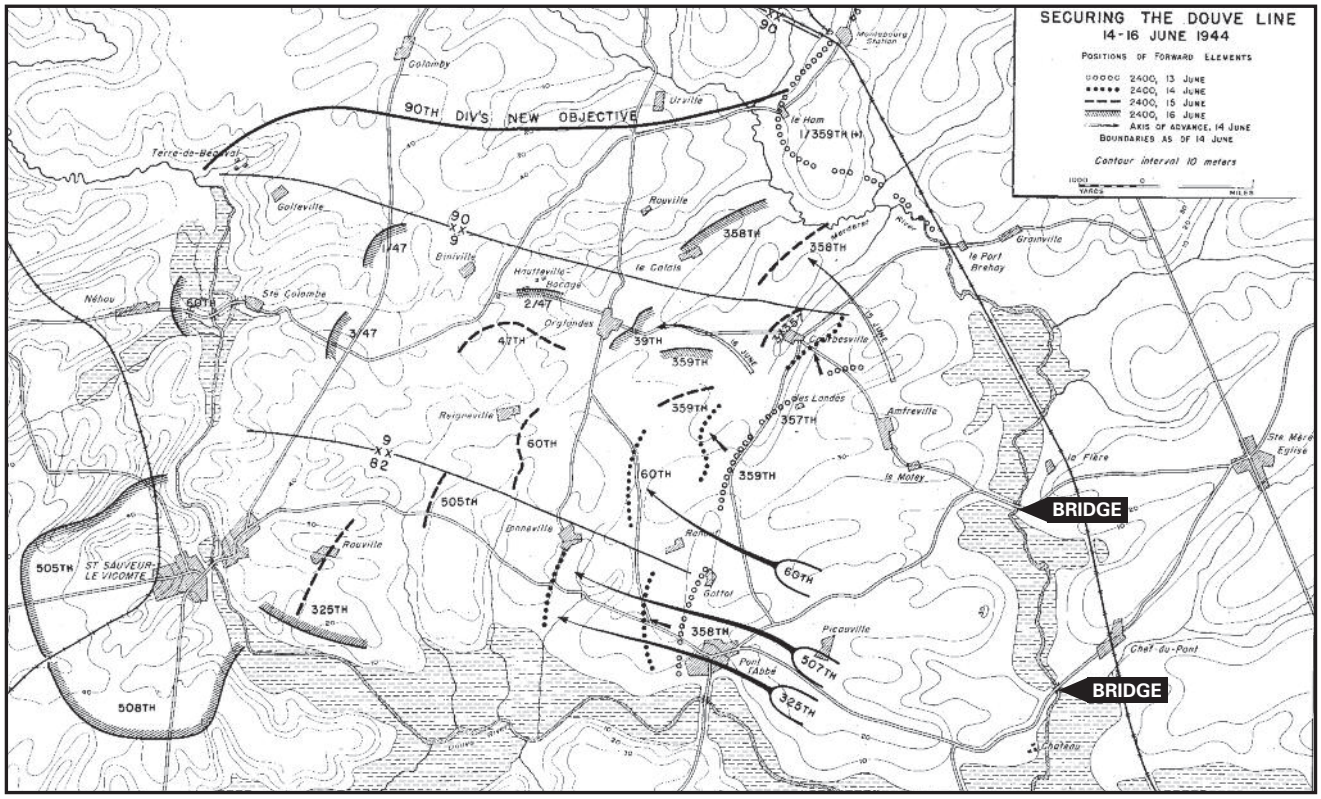
By Karel Margry

By June 9, 1944, three days after its assault on the Normandy coast, the US VII Corps of Major General Lawton J. Collins had consolidated all its units — the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions which had dropped on D-Day and the formations which had landed at Utah Beach — into a single continuous front. Also by that date, Major General Matthew B. Ridgway's 82nd Airborne Division had finally secured its two bridgeheads across the Merderet river west of Ste Mère-Eglise, one at Chef-du-Pont and one at La Fière, the latter after a sharp, bloody battle. These crossings were now to become the springboard for the major corps effort to cut westwards across the Cotentin peninsula and isolate the German forces holding out further north in defence of Cherbourg.

The mission was given to the 90th Infantry Division of Brigadier General Jay W. MacKelvie, which had begun landing on Utah Beach on D-Day. The initial divisional objective was the line of the Douve river between Terre-de-Beauval and St Sauveur-le-Vicomte, some 10 miles away to the west. Passing through the 82nd Airborne bridgehead, the division was to attack with two regiments, the 357th and 359th Infantry (the third regiment was detached to the 4th Division).

The 90th Division jumped off early in the morning of June 10, but the attack went bad from the start. On the right, the 357th Infantry scarcely advanced beyond the perimeter of the La Fière bridgehead, recoiling under its first experience with heavy enemy fire. On the left, the 358th Infantry advanced a few hundred yards from the Chef-du-Pont bridgehead, but then halted before meeting serious opposition because the regimental commander, Colonel James V. Thompson, felt that his position was insecure as the Germans still held out in a château to the rear of his position.

Though there is no town or village named Ramelle anywhere in Normandy, and a battle for a Ramelle bridge as depicted in Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (supposedly on June 13, 1944) never occurred in real life, the film episode nevertheless has clear ties with historical reality. The bridge battle itself, though fictitious, appears to combine elements of at least three historical combat actions: the 101st Airborne Division's fight for the Merderet bridges at Carentan (June 10-11); the 82nd Airborne's battle for the Chef-du-Pont bridge (June 6-9); and the 82nd's fight for the La Fière bridge (June 6-9). However, all of these bridges were situated in countryside, not in built-up areas. Instead, the film set — the ruined houses and buildings around the Ramelle bridge — was modelled in part on the pictures from yet another important battle fought by the 82nd Airborne, that of St Sauveur-le-Vicomte, which took place ten days after D-Day. *Top:* Men of the 2nd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry, advance through the shattered main street of St Sauveur on June 16. *Above:* Completely rebuilt, this is the same corner of Rue Vieux Château today.



The battle for St Sauveur-le-Vicomte was part of the US VII Corps attack to cut the Cotentin peninsula at its base as a prerequisite for the northward attack on the vital port of Cherbourg. After the green 90th Division failed in its first test under fire, the attack was taken over by the veteran 9th Infantry and 82nd Airborne Divisions, St Sauveur being the 82nd's objective.

On June 11, both regiments continued the attack, but progress was again disappointingly slow, and nightfall found them still short of the objective. The 357th was now near Les Landes and the 358th had encircled but not captured Pont-l'Abbé. Next day, June 12, the 359th Infantry, released from attachment to the 4th Division, was inserted between the two regiments, but despite this reinforcement, the 90th Division's movement remained as sticky as before. By June 13, it had struggled to its initial objectives roughly on a line from Gourbesville to Pont-l'Abbé, the latter town being captured by the 358th Infantry after aerial bombing and artillery concentration had levelled it.

The poor performance of the 90th Division in its first four days in action caused it to be heavily criticised by higher commanders. They admitted that in the hedgerow country, where each field constituted a separate battlefield and unit control was at times impossible, the normal difficulties of any division green to combat were greatly intensified, but the general feeling was that there was a lack of aggressiveness in the 90th Division. On the 12th, General Collins called Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley, commander of the US First Army, and told him the division was inadequately trained and lacked leadership. In Collins' opinion, it was not the fault of MacKelvie (who had only assumed command in January 1944), but of the division's former commander, Major General Henry Terrell. Bradley soon agreed that the 90th was 'one of the worst-trained outfits to arrive in the ETO'. On June 13, MacKelvie was relieved (without prejudice) and replaced by Major General Eugene M. Landrum. Two regimental commanders, Colonel Philip H. Ginder of the 357th and Thompson of the 358th, were relieved as well.

The 90th Division was left in the line, but General Collins decided to completely reorganise his corps attack plan. The main attack west was to be taken over by the veteran 82nd Airborne and 9th Infantry Divisions. Ridgway's 82nd was assigned the southern half of the 90th Division's zone and ordered to advance south-westward along the road from Pont-l'Abbé to St Sauveur-le-Vicomte; Major General Manton S. Eddy's 9th Division, which had begun to debark on Utah Beach on June 10, was to take over the northern half and attack toward Ste Colombe, three miles upstream from St Sauveur. After that, the 9th was to cross the Douve and cut the peninsula. Landrum's 90th Division, when passed through by the 82nd and 9th, would wheel north and advance towards Le Ham and Terre-de-Beauval, thus covering the northern flank of the westward drive.

Left: **A paratrooper section with a light machine gun has taken to the ditch along the Pont-l'Abbé—St Sauveur road at Mont-de-la-Place, the village on the high ground overlooking St Sauveur. The men are facing north, protecting the division axis against an attack from the flank. The empty Dodge truck on the road suggest the enemy has just opened fire, forcing the men to jump from their vehicle. Note the hastily parked Wehrmacht truck in the background, either just overrun at this point or one of those captured earlier and taken into use by the 82nd Airborne to enhance its mobility. Picture taken by Bob Landry of *Life*.** *Right:* **The same verge along the D130 today. The Wehrmacht truck stood parked in the gate of the local château.**

Nearby, Landry, who covered the St Sauveur battle with his colleague Bob Capa, took this often-published picture of the quintessential airborne warrior. The soldier has been identified as 1st Lieutenant Kelso C. Horne, leader of the 1st Platoon, Company I of the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, and the men in the ditch may well be of his platoon. The 508th, which had been holding the line at Baupte (west of Carentan) before, was brought forward on June 16 to reinforce the bridgehead across the Douve established by the 505th that afternoon.

One aspect which makes *Saving Private Ryan* stand out from other war movies is the authenticity of the American paratroopers' uniform. SM Wholesalers of Los Angeles accurately copied the unique M1942 parachutist's blouse, with its angled, expandable and press-stud fastened breast pockets, and the trousers with large thigh pockets — a distinctive garment which, like their high lace-up leather jumpboots, was the hallmark of American paratroopers. The infantry uniforms were provided by Juan Gonzales of WWII Impressions, Downey, California.

The new offensive jumped off on the morning of June 14. In the 82nd Airborne sector, the initial attack was led by the 90th Division's 358th Infantry. It had been agreed that this regiment should seize the road junction 1,000 yards to the west and that the 82nd was to carry the attack from there. Despite close-range mortar fire and 88mm fire from across the Douve river, the 358th gained the objective and, at noon, the 82nd's 507th Parachute Infantry (temporarily commanded by the regimental executive, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Maloney) and the 325th Glider Infantry (also under temporary command of its executive, Lieutenant Colonel Herbert G. Sitler) began passing through, moving abreast in columns of battalions, left and right of the highway respectively. They had plenty of artillery support, the 82nd's three own artillery battalions having been reinforced by the 188th Field Artillery Battalion on June 13. However, the artillery had difficulty keeping up with the 507th's advance, and mishap occurred when a heavy barrage of friendly fire fell on its leading 2nd Battalion. An evening counter-attack forced back the 507th's right a few hundred yards, but at the end of the day the two regiments had pushed forward about a mile and had reached the road running south from Bonneville.

Meanwhile, on the right, the 9th Division's 60th Infantry was committed in the gap opened by the 90th Division pivoting to the north. Advancing slowly under enemy mortar and artillery fire, by dark the regiment had reached the Valognes — Pont-l'Abbé highway.

However, further north, the virtual paralysis of the 90th Division continued. Two full days of fighting were required for the 357th to take Gourbesville, while the 359th inched forward towards Orglandes and the 358th, committed on the 15th on the division right flank, achieved little gains.

Whatever else may explain the 90th Division's continued poor performance, there is no doubt that German opposition on the north and north-west was substantially stronger than on the west. While Landrum faced elements of Generalleutnant Rudolf

Left: **A paratrooper escorts two German prisoners to the rear at Mont-de-la-Place. The road at this point is already descending towards St Sauveur.** *Right:* **Mont-de-la-Place, actually a suburb of St Sauveur, was spared the 'time on target' artillery concentrations which pummelled the town on the day of the battle, and the sturdy farmhouses along the road survive unchanged.**

A few yards further on, local French inhabitants watch the same PoWs being led away. The Germans opposing the 82nd Airborne at St Sauveur were the remnants of the 91. Luftlande-Division bolstered up with small Kampfgruppen from the 265. Infanterie-Division sent up from Brittany.

St Sauveur as seen from the east. This is how the 82nd Airborne troops saw the town when they reached the high ground overlooking it at noon on June 16. In the right foreground is the Douve bridge used by the 505th Parachute Infantry to establish its bridgehead. In the centre, to the right of the houses pulverised by aerial bombardment and by the gun barrages of June 16, lies the town's medieval castle. Most of the action pictures inside the town were taken along the main street which leads west out of town in the centre of the picture.

Stegmann's 77. Infanterie-Division, recently arrived from Brittany, opposition to the drive west was still only coming from the 91. Luftlande-Division, commanded by Oberst Eugen Koenig (Generalmajor Wilhelm Falley had been killed by US paratroops on D-Day) and by now beaten down to a battle-weary Kampfgruppe. A Kampfgruppe of the 265. Infanterie-Division (Generalleutnant Walther Düvert) was being brought up from Brittany, but the bulk of this new unit was committed in the Pretot area on the other side of the Douve further south. General der Artillerie Wilhelm Fahrmbacher, who replaced General der Artillerie Erich Marcks as commander of the LXXXIV. Armeekorps after the latter's death in an air attack on June 12, reported to 7. Armee on the 14th that a large-scale American attack westward could not be held because of the fragmentation and mixing of units, the fatigue of the troops and the lack of sufficient ammunition.

His estimation was correct. On June 15, the 82nd Airborne accelerated its advance. Attacking astride the highway to St Sauveur, Ridgway's division encountered only moderate resistance throughout the day, even with the enemy using some tanks to oppose the

Right: **The repaired Douve bridge today.**

Left: **Lieutenant Colonel Ben Vandervoort, commander of the 2nd Battalion, 505th, had broken his left ankle in the D-Day jump, but he refused to be evacuated and continued to lead his men on crutches.** *Right:* **Here he stands in the Rue Vieux Château. The trooper behind him has armed himself with a German MP40 sub-machine gun.**

advance. The 325th Glider Infantry made the largest gains and reached Rauville, only 1,000 yards from St Sauveur. The 507th again suffered from an unfortunate barrage of friendly fire. In mid-afternoon, the regiment was relieved by the 505th Parachute Infantry (Colonel William E. Ekman), the change slowing the advance on the right. Nevertheless, the 505th, attacking though the 507th with two battalions astride the road, made up for much of the time lost. The 2nd Battalion, led by Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Vandervoort (who had broken an ankle in the D-Day jump but had continued to lead his battalion on crutches) hit an enemy strong point near the hamlet of La Rosiers, but overcame this with the help of two Sherman tanks of Company A of the 746th Tank Battalion. By nightfall, the 505th had advanced three miles and reached a line south of Reigneville, two miles from St Sauveur. That day, the 82nd identified elements of two regiments of the 265. Division, Infanterie-Regiment 894 and Infanterie-Regiment 895, among the units opposing it.

In the 9th Division sector, the increasing gap with the 90th Division permitted General Eddy to commit a second regiment, the 47th Infantry, on his right wing. Advancing rapidly, by dark the 47th had reached its objective, the high ground west of Orglandes. On the division's left wing, the 60th Infantry was hit shortly after jump-off by a strong counter-attack supported by tanks which drove it back to its line of departure. Fighting through the remainder of the day succeeded in recovering only about half the lost ground. Resistance here turned out to be the enemy's last stand east of the Douve.

To keep the enemy from reinforcing and organising a better-coordinated defence, it was essential to push to the Douve river line quickly. In planning the continuation of the attack on June 16, the corps commander, General Collins, decided to drive to the Douve with his southernmost regiment, the 82nd's 325th Glider Infantry, regardless of whether commensurate advances could be made on the rest of the front. The whole attack would thus be echeloned to the right rear, as each regiment refused its right to tie in with the regiment to the north of it. The main effort of the corps, Collins announced on the 15th, would now be to cut the Cotentin peninsula. To give more weight and cohesion to the attack, the 9th Division received its third regiment, the 39th Infantry (which had been detached to the 4th Division), back under command and in addition was given the 90th Division's 359th Infantry, so that General Eddy now could attack with four regiments in line — from left to right the 60th, 47th, 359th and 39th.

The attack of the 82nd Airborne Division again made rapid advances on the 16th. Jumping off in the early morning, Ridgway's units met little resistance, the chief obstacle being the considerable artillery fire falling on the troops. Assisted by the tanks of Company A, 746th Tank Battalion, both the 325th Glider Infantry and the 505th Parachute Infantry made good progress. The 1st Battalion, 505th, (Lieutenant Colonel Mark J. Alexander) was initially held up by an 88mm in their path, but later that morning reached and blocked the main Valognes—La Haye-du-Puits north-south highway (which crosses the Douve at St Sauveur).

By noon, the 325th and 505th had closed into positions on the high ground east of the river, overlooking St Sauveur. The town had

All houses around the junction of the Coutances/La Haye-du-Puits and Portbail roads at the eastern end of St Sauveur have been completely rebuilt.

Men of Vandervoort's battalion fight their way up Rue Bottin-Desylles, St Sauveur's main street, towards the railway station where the Germans are still holding out.

The two gutted houses have gone, still leaving an open space today.

been pulverised by Allied aircraft. From their vantage position at Mont-de-la-Place, the Americans could see German troops, trucks and horse-drawn transport withdrawing from the town. Closer in, between them and the town, they could see the Douve bridge, damaged but not broken.

The original corps order for the attack had stipulated that the 82nd only advance as far as the Douve line and not beyond. However, Ridgway, realising the possibilities of the situation, asked Corps for permission to cross the river into town and establish a bridgehead. As it happened, General Bradley, the army commander, was visiting the 82nd Command Post just then and, rather than lose time waiting for Collins' reply, Bradley gave Ridgway permission on the spot. Ridgway immediately ordered the 505th Parachute Infantry to cross the river and seize the town.

Meanwhile, he had the artillery deliver interdictory fire on the roads leading north, west and south from the town. An 82nd forward observer arranged a concentrated 'time on target' gun barrage by all VII Corps artillery battalions in the vicinity. Those who watched it could not hear the guns being fired, but suddenly there was a deafening roar overhead and a split-second later most of St Sauveur erupted in a cloud of smoke, fire and shrapnel which wreaked havoc among the German columns in and around the town. A second barrage was thrown in for good measure.

As soon as the artillery was lifted, Vandervoort's 2nd Battalion, 505th, began crossing the river by way of the damaged bridge. Spreading out on the far side, the paratroops entered the town, pushing beyond its medieval castle and through the ruins caused by the air attacks and the artillery barrage. They knocked out two 75mm self-propelled guns which had miraculously survived the barrage and opened fire on the battalion, and killed or captured those Germans left in town. Alexander's 1st Battalion, 505th, followed on the heels of the 2nd and, moving through it, occupied the high ground to the north-west. All this time, heavy shelling was coming down around the bridge and General Bradley, observing the attack with Ridgway, is reputed to have said: 'My God, Matt, can't anything stop these men?' To which Ridgway is said to have replied: 'Sir, I would rather have a platoon of those men than a battalion of regular infantry.'

In mid-afternoon, Ridgway brought forward the 508th Parachute Infantry (Colonel Roy E. Lindquist) from Etienville, where it had been in Division reserve. Its 3rd Battalion relieved the 3rd Battalion, 505th, in its blocking position on the Valognes—

House No. 50 — then and now.

Above: **A 505th trooper carrying a machine-gun tripod dashes past a 57mm anti-tank gun (the American version of the British 6-pounder) of the 80th Airborne AA/Anti-Tank Battalion on Rue Bottin-Desylles. The gun can be seen at the top of the street in the previous picture, next to a wrecked Citroën staff car.**

St Sauveur road (on the high ground east of the Douve), enabling the latter to cross into the bridgehead as well and occupy the area to the south-east.

By dark, a firm defensive perimeter had been established 2,000 to 2,500 yards out from the town. That evening, engineers bridged the Douve enabling tanks to enter the town. About 2230 hours, Ridgway moved the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 508th, across the river to take over the southern half of the 505th bridgehead, straddling the main road south to La Haye-du-Puits.

In the three-day attack, the 82nd Airborne Division had advanced some seven miles, captured a vital bridgehead, and smashed the 91. Luftlande-division beyond repair. Over 1,000 of the enemy had been killed or captured.

Again, a gap in the line of houses marks the spot where a house burned down.

The events at St Sauveur were a turning point in the whole drive westward. The success of the 82nd Airborne gave such impetus to the 9th Division's attack that it gathered a momentum which carried it swiftly across the peninsula. That afternoon, its 60th Infantry, after a cross-country sweep, entered Ste Colombe and, without pausing, crossed the Douve and established a small bridgehead on the west bank. Next day, June 17, with the 60th Infantry attacking from there and the 47th Infantry through the 82nd's bridgehead at St Sauveur, the 9th Division advanced the remaining miles to the Atlantic Ocean, reaching the coast road near Barneville-sur-Mer late on the 17th. Units of the German 77. Infanterie-Division, not wanting to be trapped in the Cotentin, attempted to fight their way south, but all escape routes were effectively blocked on the 18th. The Cotentin had been successfully sealed off and Cherbourg isolated.

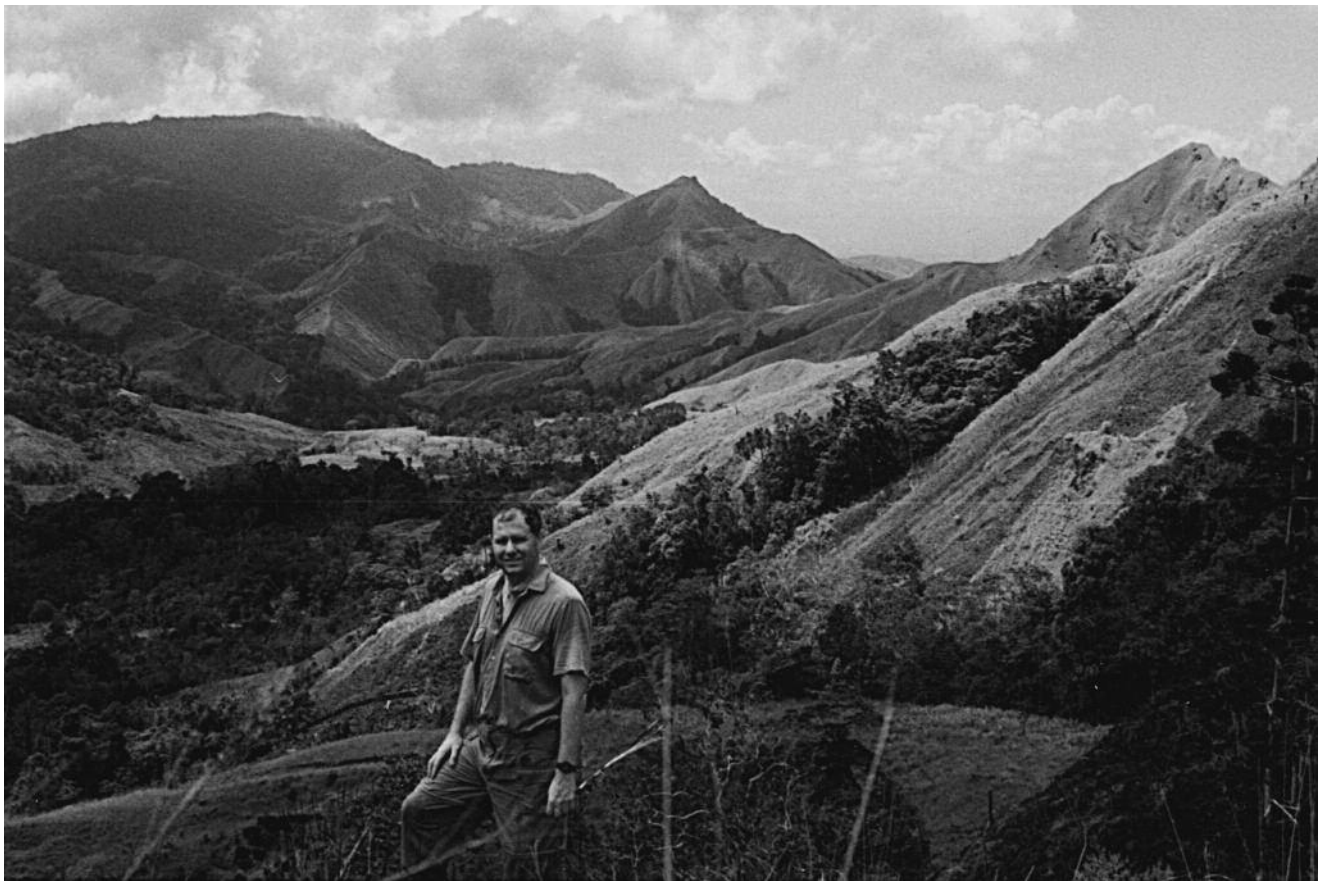
The action fought by the 82nd Airborne at St Sauveur-le-Vicomte had been decisive for the overall outcome of the battle, and the town's capture was later estimated to have hastened the fall of Cherbourg by at least two weeks.

Below: **Another trooper follows the machine-gunner across the street.**

Sitting on the bumper of the same Citroën, a platoon leader shouldering a BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) listens to a situation report from one of his men and then appears to add the new information on his map. The pictures of the St Sauveur battle taken by Robert Capa — of Omaha Beach fame — and Bob Landry were all released through the war Press Photo Pool.

St Sauveur then . . . Hatfield now. Fifty-three years later another car (this time an Opel Olympia of 1938) stands in the wrecked street of another town — albeit a make-believe one — on an English airfield . . . yet the similarity is there . . . linking the cameraman of yesterday with the movie-maker of today. Steven Spielberg with his Steadicam cameraman Chris Haarhoff about to shoot the battle in the rain featuring the unnamed little French girl played by Anna Maguire.

Prologue. In November 1943, as the tide of war in the Pacific turned in favour of the Allies, Australian forces were pushing the Japanese back across New Guinea. North-west of Lae, a patrol from the 2/27th Battalion of the 7th Division was pictured *(above)* **on the south-western approaches to 'Shaggy Ridge' — so named after the nick-name of the long-haired commander of 'A' Company, Captain Bob Clampett. Second from the right in the photo taken on November 5 stands Corporal Jack Bradley of 'B' Company.** *Below:* **November 1996 and Phillip Bradley proudly stands in his father's footprints on the same remote hillside during an emotional trip to revisit his father's battlefield.**



SHAGGY RIDGE

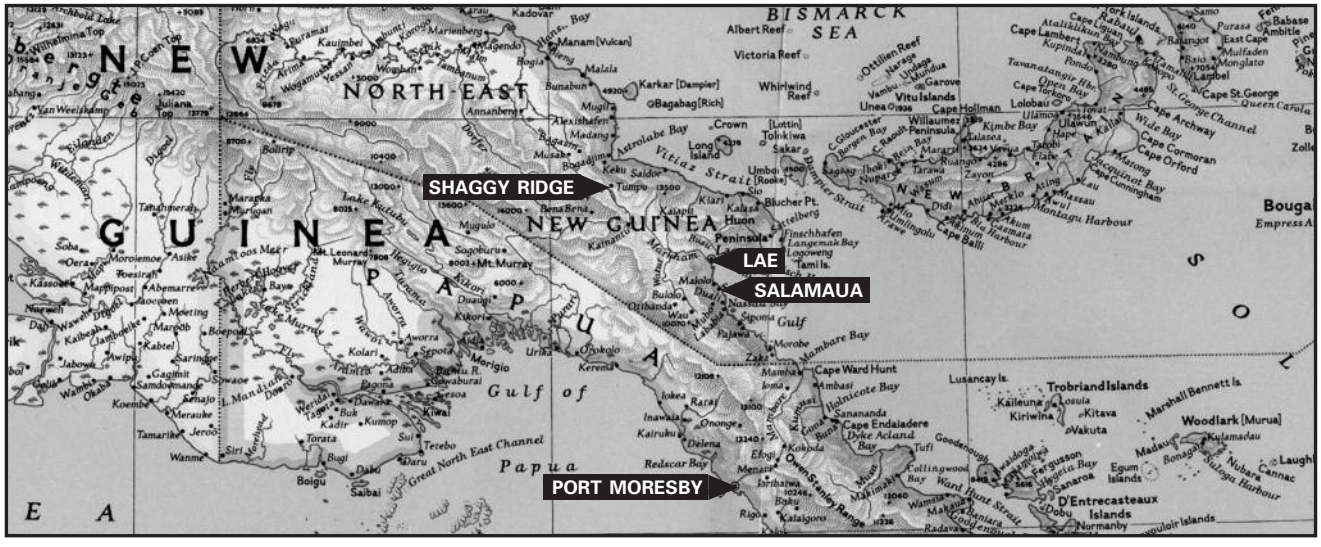
By Phillip Bradley

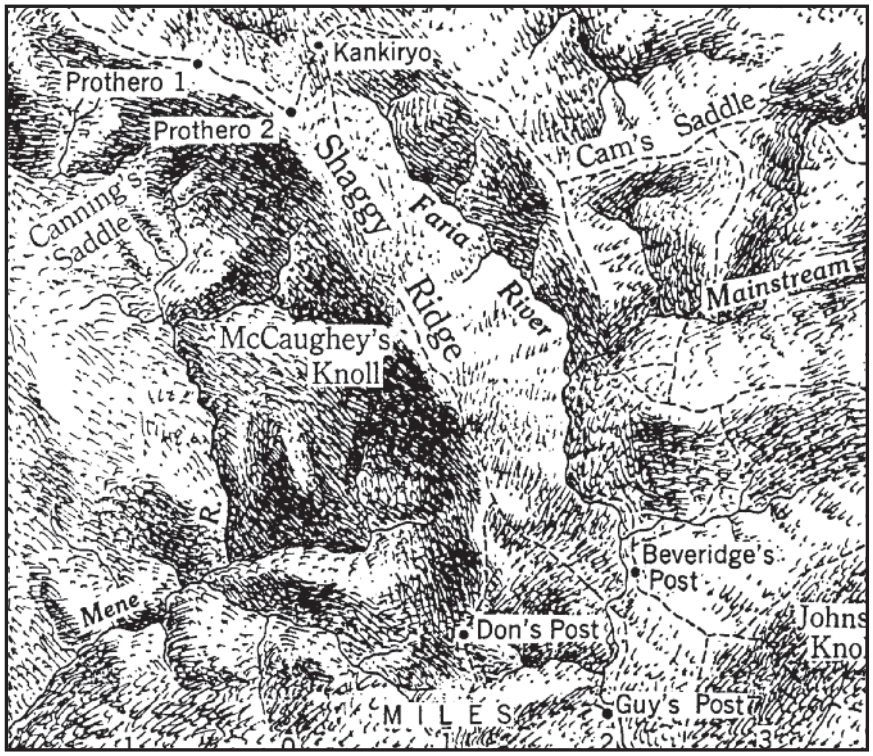
The second half of 1943 was a major turning point in the Pacific War as the Allies took up the offensive across the Pacific. On the Aleutians in the north and on the Gilbert Islands in the Central Pacific, major Allied victories together with the rising strength of the US fleet, saw the Japanese-controlled perimeter steadily pushed back.

At the southern extremity of the Japanese sphere of influence, on the New Guinea mainland, the Australians, having previously stopped the Japanese advance on Port Moresby, and then thrown them back into the sea at the Buna and Gona beach-heads, now took the fight across the Owen Stanley Range to the major Japanese bases of Salamaua and Lae. Salamaua fell to Australian and American troops on September 11, 1943. One week previously, in the Allies' first large-scale airborne assault of the Pacific War, Allied forces took the Nadzab area west of Lae and Australian forces marched on the city. Meanwhile on the coast north of Lae, Australian forces landed at the Busu river and also marched on the enemy strong point. Trapped between the two advances, the Japanese fled to the north-west and abandoned Lae. Australian 7th Division forces marched in on September 16 soon followed by 9th Division units which had advanced down the coast from their beach-heads.

One of the stepping stones on the way to Shaggy Ridge was Nadzab airfield, captured by the US 503rd Airborne on September 5. *Top:* **This picture was taken on the 20th as the Australians were desperately ferrying supplies and reinforcements forward to Kaiapit. (AWM)**

The main strip at Nadzab is now used as the airport for Lae though there are still reminders — like this P-38 Lightning — that it was once one of the largest Allied military airbase complexes in the South Pacific theatre.





With Lae fallen and major airbase construction proceeding at Nadzab (ultimately five strips were built), the way was open for an advance up the Markham and Ramu valleys to Madang. The Australians were already on their way — after a bold move forward by air, the 2/6th Independent Company had stormed into Kaiapit on September 19 and a forward airstrip was soon made ready. In the process, a major Japanese counter-attack was defeated and 264 dead Japanese were left in front of the Australian positions. Major General George Vasey, the Australian 7th Division commander, was moving fast. On September 21, the 2/16th Battalion flew into a basic landing strip at Kaiapit, followed by the 2/27th Battalion on September 23, both battalions having been flown directly from Port Moresby. The remaining battalion of the 21st Brigade, the 2/14th Battalion flew in the next day, and by October 5 the brigade had marched along the valley, across a number of major unbridged rivers to Dumpu and as far as Kesawai at the head of the Ramu valley. Airstrip building and upgrading was promptly commenced at Gusap and at Dumpu, and the first Australian troops turned north into the Finisterre Ranges above Dumpu. These were the 2/27th Battalion troops and they had the job of trying to locate the Japanese line of communication which ran through the mountains from Madang.

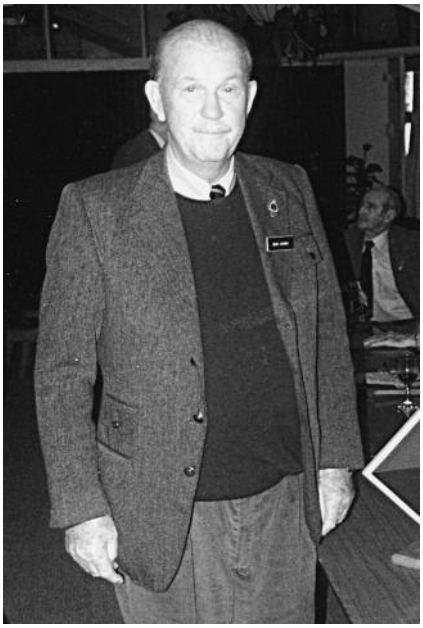
The 2/27th moved quickly up the Faria river taking various hills and knolls on the way, before taking the village of Kumbarum and the prominent position of Johns' Knoll which, unbeknown to them, lay astride the main Japanese supply route from Madang to the Ramu valley. The Australians probed further along the Faria river; Clive Edwards was a sergeant in 'D' Company and his platoon led the advance forward. His diary told the story:

'After being held up by 3 Section much to my disgust and annoyance, our platoon minus 1 Section, who are on escort duty, set off up the Faria as advance guard to the battalion. Once again it was slow cautious work but all went well for the first mile when bang! bang! bang! three shots rang out. I was in the centre of the platoon and knew instantly that they were our rifle shots and it transpired that Rocky Chellew had sighted some Japs coming, hid himself, and killed the lot of them before they could fire a shot — it was a grand effort. A recce was sent out and reported some 20-odd Japs coming down the river towards us, obviously a fighting patrol, and Tren [Lieutenant Rex Trenerry] decided to lay in wait for them. It took a long time for anything to happen so I took a risk and went forward to see what was going on. Then I took up my old position behind a thumping

Johns' Knoll is the first wooded hill directly above the vehicle. Off to the left can be seen the southern shoulder of Shaggy Ridge rising almost vertically above Guy's Post.

Left: **A foxhole today on the summit of Johns' Knoll. Fortunately, the ground here could be readily dug which enabled the Australian defenders to maintain good cover in the face of very heavy artillery, machine-gun and rifle fire.**

Right: **Australian grenades and 2-inch mortar bombs found on Johns' Knoll. After the October fighting here, the feature became an important fire-base supporting the battle for Shaggy Ridge.**



Left: **Some of the men of No. 7 Platoon, 'A' Company, 2/27th Battalion (the '2' prefix was added to distinguish them from the original First World War battalions). The platoon commander, Lieutenant Bob Johns, is second from right handing out mail. On his right is Private Ron Barnes who played a critical rôle when he recovered a Bren gun from further down the slope after the gunner had been hit. Second from the left is Ray Fisher who had his rifle shattered by a Japanese grenade. Refusing to be evacuated, he continued to carry forward vital supplies. (AWM)** *Right:* **Bob Johns today. As a sergeant, he won the Military Medal leading his platoon in heavy fighting in Syria, at one point riding down the main street of enemy-held Sidon on a captured motorcycle. In the Papuan campaign he was wounded leading his platoon against the Japanese bunkers behind the beach at Gona. On Johns' Knoll his platoon held the largest enemy attack of the campaign.**

great rock and waited. Then it started! A burst of LMG fire came from the left bank and killed Acker Brown. I saw the bushes shake with the blast of the gun and pumped about ten shots into the place and must have got him for he didn't fire again. Things were moving by this and he lobbed a few grenades from his discharger pretty close behind my posse, one of them getting Bev [Sergeant Beveridge]. Orders came up from the rear that we were to withdraw and take up a position to guard the creek junction which was 200 yds behind.'

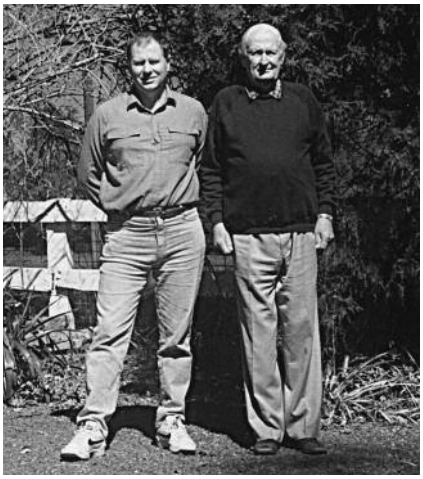
The Japanese forces in the area, members of the 78th Regiment, counter-attacked on October 12 and a considerable weight of the attack fell on a platoon of 19 men under Lieutenant Bob Johns after whom the knoll was later named. The attacks started at 11.45 a.m. and continued throughout the day. Initial attacks used grenade-throwers but soon the Japanese were making fanatical bayonet charges up the sides of the knoll. Fighting was fierce on the steep, kunai-crested hill, with only one six-man section under Paddy Carey able to dig in on the peak. Their fire down onto the lower slopes was critical as was the 3-inch mortar support directed by Sergeant Cockburn who was positioned just to the rear of the forward Bren gun position. The Japanese got to within a few feet of the Australian positions but, just as this pressure and the effects of low ammunition were going to force a withdrawal, other 2/27th units, who had heard the battle, attacked from the flanks below the knoll to help drive the Japanese back.

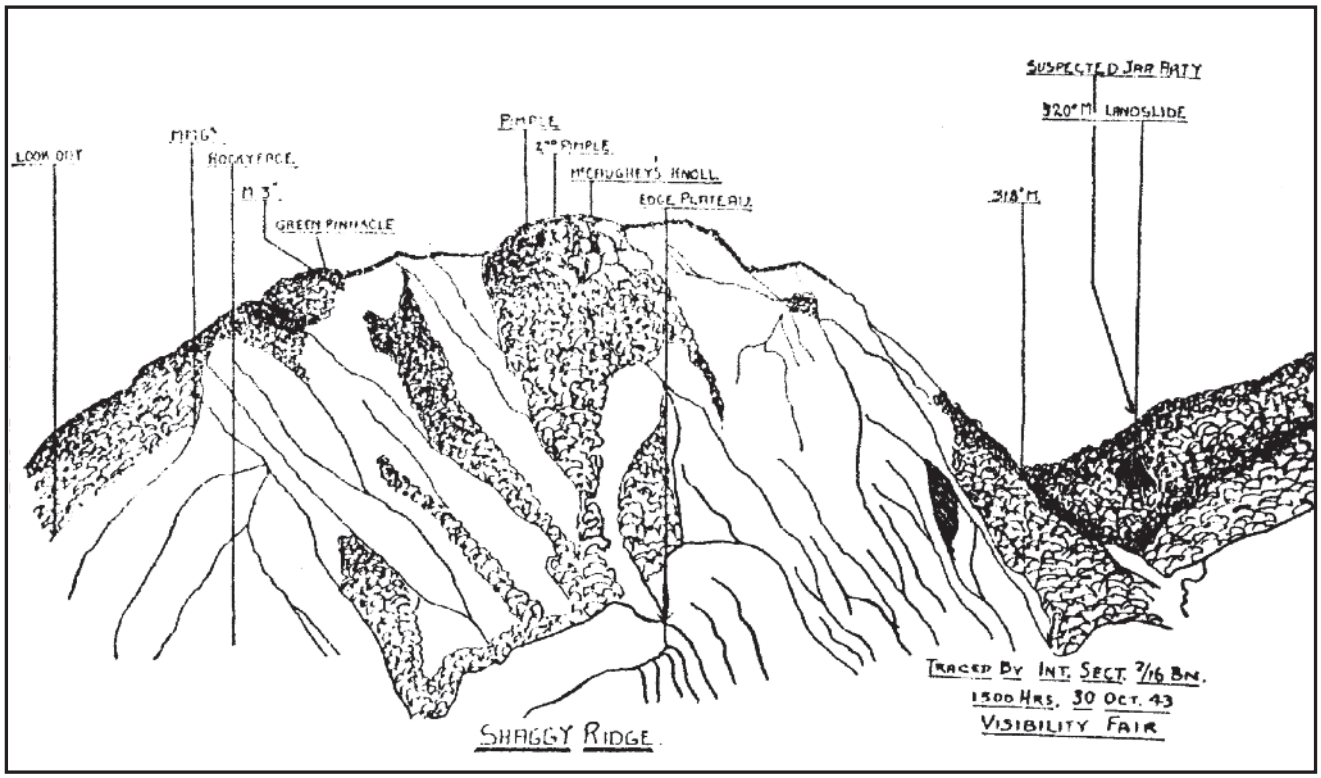
That night, a native carrier supply train of 300 porters somehow made it to Johns' Knoll after trekking in the dark and rain along the river gorge and up the steep jungle-covered slopes. Not for the first time in this campaign were the Australians to give thanks for their presence. In the morning, over 200 dead were found in front of the Australian positions — the Japanese would not lightly relinquish these ranges. But the success of the Australians here at Johns' Knoll had broken the back of the Japanese 78th Regiment. They had committed two of their three battalions here.

The main base of operations in the area was now set up at Guy's Post, on a plateau across the Faria river valley from John's Knoll. Above Guy's Post rose the feature that was to dominate the fighting here for the next four months — a razorback ridge of some 5,000 feet that rose almost sheer 2,500 feet up from Guy's Post. It would become known as Shaggy Ridge, named after 'Shaggy' Bob Clampett, the commander of 'A' Company of the 2/27th Battalion. His were the first troops to scale the ridge.

Side view of Shaggy Ridge rising like a vertical wall above the Faria river valley in the foreground and looking across to the Ramu valley in the background. The picture was taken in 1943 while the Japanese still held the feature. The Australian infantry advanced along the ridge from the left of the photo. The eastern side of the hill mass is clear of major jungle whereas the western side is very thick. Joining the Faria river from the bottom of the photo is Mainstream. (AWM)

Left: **'Shaggy' Bob Clampett (with short back and sides!) — a photo taken in 1940 when he was on his way to the Middle East. In Syria he earned his commission in the field and also his nickname when his commanding officer berated him over the length of his hair, exclaiming he looked like 'one of the bloody shaggy goats out there in the snow'.** *Right:* **Nowadays, Bob spends his time at his rural retreat in the gently rolling hills outside Adelaide and the precipitous slopes of Shaggy Ridge seem a long time and distance away. Pictured here with the author in 1997.** *Below:* **'Panorama drawing from Mortar OP Johns' Knoll' — a sketch reproduced from the war diary of the 2/16th Battalion, October 1943.** *Bottom:* **Phillip Bradley's picture of Shaggy Ridge looking from the east across the Faria valley showing the wooded re-entrant below McCaughey's Knoll.**





Left: **The view today from the Japanese-held knoll looking south-east down on the jungle approaches to the position. The remnants of a trench are visible in the foreground.**

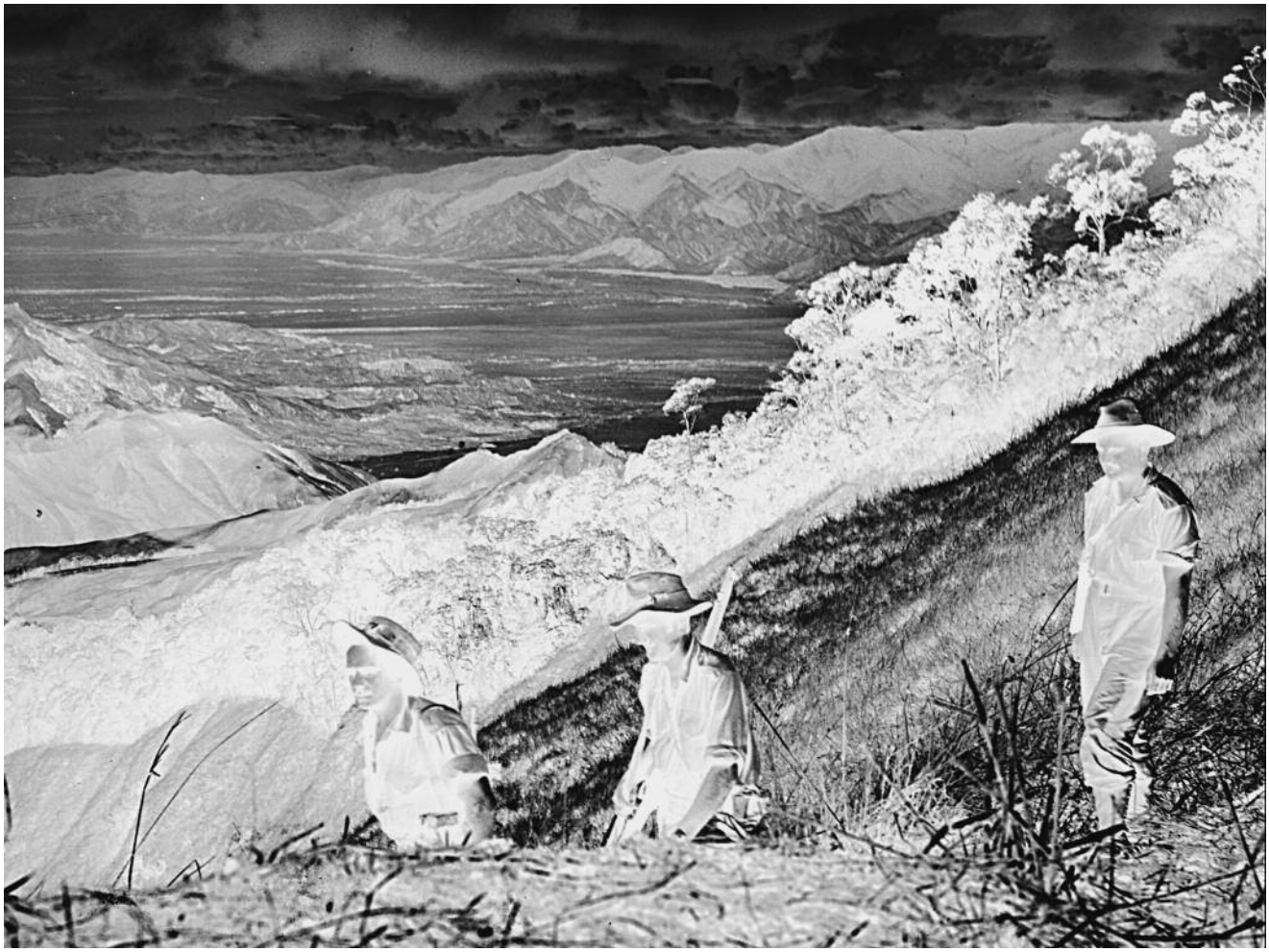
Right: **Over 50 years later, the original four-strand Japanese barbed wire barrier is still in place on the southern end of the ridge.**

On October 16, Sergeant John Mulcahy led a patrol from Clampett's 'A' Company up onto the southern end of the ridge and later reported his observations:

'Shaggy Ridge is razorback all the way. Tropical growth and vegetation very thick from half way along to the far end. Track we followed appeared to be an old pig track, then about 80 yards before the last rise to the high knoll, we came across a recently used pad which led to a four-strand barbed wire fence with tins hanging on it, so that they would rattle when moved. Barbed wire appeared to run right around the foot of the high knoll-fence only recently erected in area. Sighted Japanese-prepared position behind fence, but no troop movement. I would estimate from the knoll, he could see down the Ramu valley, also part of the Faria valley above feature on which the 2/14th Infantry Battalion's standing patrol is situated.'

One of the men who patrolled up onto the ridge was Sergeant Les Threadgold who with Private George Van Delure was put out in front of the company positions to act as the forward scouts. George had come to the 2/27th via the Australian Commando units fighting the guerilla war on Japanese-held Timor Island and was well versed in such operations. Les was also well qualified for the job, having spent two weeks behind Japanese lines on the Kokoda Trail a year earlier. He was able to get right up to the wire fence and observe the Japanese digging in, creating fire lanes and laying cut bamboo out as an approach warning. At one point, he was within a few feet of an enemy soldier who saw the bushes move as Les tried to get away. The Japanese soldier quickly dived back into his foxhole fortunately leaving his rifle behind and Les was able to move on.

On October 23, while Les Threadgold and George Van Delure reconnoitered the area in front of the Japanese positions, they were surprised to find a war photographer in their vicinity. After pestering 'A' Company HQ further back to be allowed to go forward, the photographer asked Les and George where the Japanese were. They told him to keep quiet and listen and moments later he went white with shock — the Japanese could be heard talking in their positions only yards away. Les offered to go up and photograph them but the photographer wouldn't hear of it but, before he quickly departed, he was able to capture one of the most poignant images of the campaign. Les holds the Owen sub-machine gun, fitted with reversible magazines. By the time he arrived on Shaggy Ridge, Les *(right)* **had certainly seen a lot of the war. He was in the Middle East and then fought in the muddy hell of the Kokoda Trail where he spent two weeks cut off in the jungle behind enemy lines. He took part in the advance to the north Papuan coast and was at the front at the Japanese beach-head at Gona where he had left six dead Japanese around his foxhole during a night-time break-out.**



On the Shaggy Ridge razorback — November 1943. These 2/27th Battalion troops are moving up to the forward positions in front of the Pimple. On the left is Private Ray Chapman who with his two brothers, Des and Max, fought through the entire war with the 2/27th. Most extraordinary was that the three were among the 600 men of the 2/27th who entered the earlier Kokoda campaign and were still together among the 40 who walked out of the final hell of Gona. A fourth brother, Lance, was killed at El Alamein. (AWM)

Meanwhile, other Australian forces were patrolling along the Faria valley below Shaggy Ridge as well as along the ridges and slopes to the west. What was obvious was that the ridge dominated the entire region, with views up and down the Ramu valley and north as far as Madang on the coast. They could also watch the airbase at Dumpu, now the Australian Army's key airhead. The Japanese knew that if they could hold Shaggy Ridge they could hold the push to the north coast and they had consequently entrenched themselves along the razorback, particularly at the narrowest points and had manhandled mountain guns up onto the northern end of the feature and onto Kankiryo Saddle. With cloud and mist frequently covering the ridge, the Japanese were able to fire unobserved on the Australian positions.

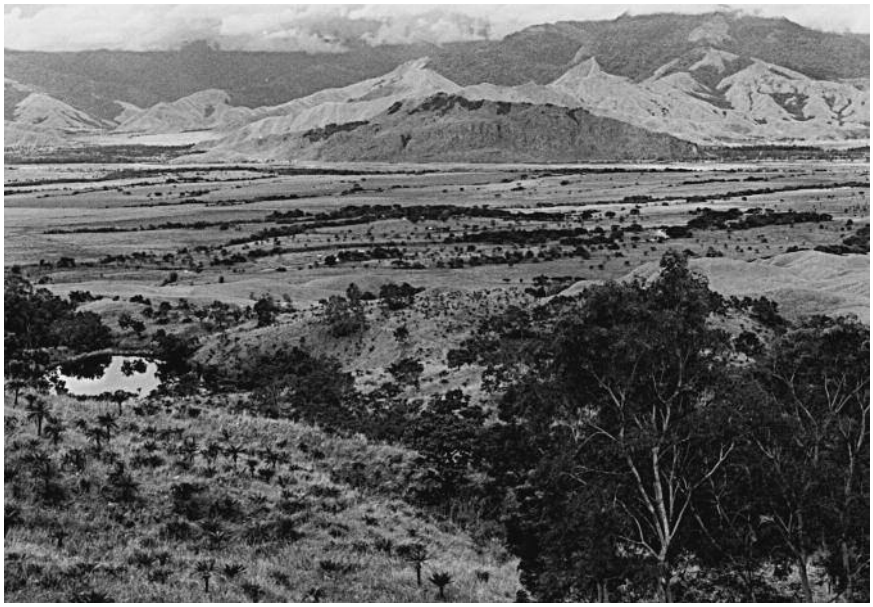
Cloud often blankets the ridge, but nothing else changes. In the foreground is Vic Lemon, whose father also fought with the 2/27th in this campaign. Like Phillip, he has a fascination with the landscape, its people and the war history of the area, and he has made the trip from Australia three times in the last four years.

Above: **Overlooking the lake area where the Australian artillery was positioned. Further back in the Ramu valley the veritable city that has grown up around Dumpu airstrip can faintly be seen. The Jeep track shown on page 49 is visible in the middle distance. (AWM)**

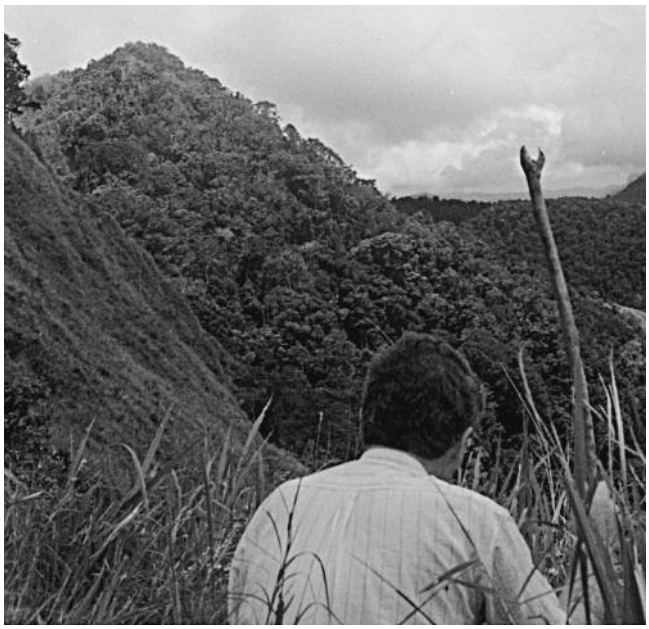
To take the ridge, General Vasey now accumulated his forces for a set-piece assault. 25-pounder guns were brought forward into the lakes region in the foothills above Dumpu, and using forward observers on Shaggy Ridge they were able to lay down a heavy barrage on the Japanese positions at the southern end of the feature. Les Threadgold had taken the artillery observer Captain Bill Whyte forward and he was able to bring down the artillery fire directly on the enemy foxholes. Altogether there were in excess of 30 foxholes, six of which had received direct hits from the 25-pounder guns. The barrage forced the Japanese to withdraw back along the ridge, and patrols soon established that they were now solidly installed in a network of foxholes behind a narrow rocky 'pimple' on the ridge. This would be but the first of the 'pimples' that had to be taken, but this first one would always be simply called 'The Pimple'. They were natural fortresses and the Japanese had honeycombed them with foxholes and bunkers.

Following the success of the initial bombardment on the southern end of the ridge, General Vasey decided that such tactics may force the Japanese from the entire hill mass step by step. For the next two months, the army's artillery, mortars and machine guns kept up a constant bombardment with support from the air force, but the Japanese defenders would not budge. Inevitably, it would be the infantry who would have to go in and do the job where one man could hold at bay an entire army.

It would be a full-scale assault, played out on a battlefield where weight of numbers meant little as the assault force could only be deployed along the very top of the ridge. The Western Australians of the 2/16th Battalion were to carry out the ground attack, with the support of the 2/4th Field Regiment gunners back in the foothills. Some 3,500 25-pounder shells were fired at the ridge on the morning



Right: **The track is now hidden by the kunai grass but the landscape is eternal.**



Bombardment on December 27 of the Pimple which lies behind the tree-covered knoll known as the Green Pinnacle. (AWM)

of the attack: December 27, 1943. As the artillery bombardment finished, 16 Kittyhawk fighter-bombers, led in by two Boomerang fighters firing tracers, hit the ridge, and as the thunder of the bombing rolled down the valleys, the infantry began the attack.

The initial assault would be made by 'B' Company but it would only be possible for a single platoon to effectively deploy for the attack. The assault platoon was led by Captain Arthur Geyton with one section on the right, one on the left and one in reserve. With so few troops forward, individual fire power would be critical and the riflemen in these sections carried 100 rounds of rifle ammunition plus six grenades while the Owen and Bren gunners had 300 rounds at their disposal.

The leading platoon faced a daunting prospect as there was a steep incline up to the Pimple, and the sides of the ridge were nearly sheer at this point. Geyton's platoon moved over the start line just after 9 a.m. to scale the incline, and after about 15 minutes they were about 50 yards from the Pimple summit having clambered up through the loose shale thrown up by the bombardment. The bamboo ladders that had been carried forward for the assault proved too cumbersome in the conditions and were abandoned. The key to the Japanese position was a well-sited bunker just below the summit from which the Japanese defenders threw down grenades. Corporal 'Pinky' McMahon's section on the left was held up and it was only the timely intervention of Corporal Mervyn Hall who led his section in from the right that enabled the position to be taken. Though wounded, Hall dashed ahead and wiped out the bunker single-handed. He was awarded the DCM and the platoon won a footing on the Pimple. Yet it would not be the last time that an individual would determine the outcome of the battle for the ridge.

Awaiting battle. Privates Knight and Mortimer of the 2/16th Battalion await the completion of the bombardment before moving forward. (AWM)

It was now 9.46 a.m., and Australian observation posts further back on the ridge could see the West Australians on top of the Pimple. Artillery observers were sent forward to provide support. Meanwhile, Geyton did not linger and got his platoon forward another 100 yards to where another pimple rose up on the ridge to block his path.

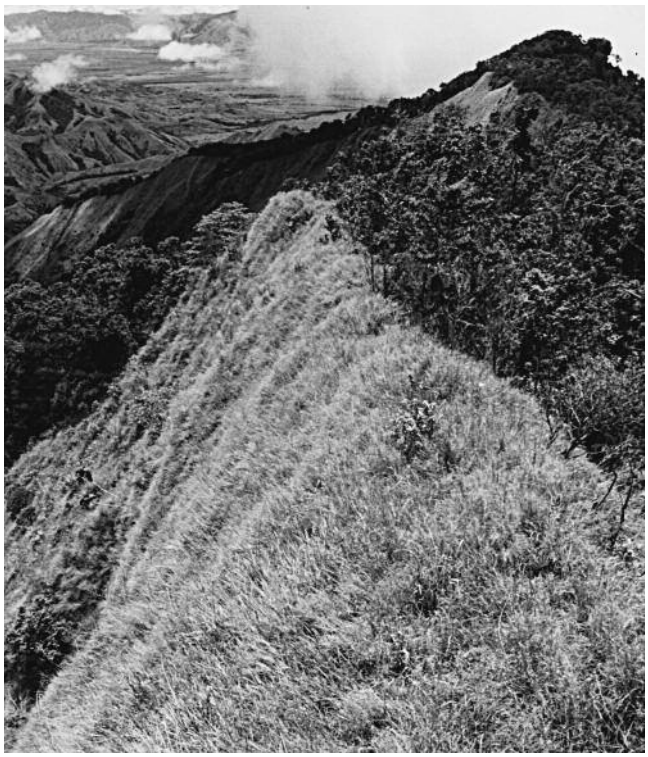
Captain Ron Christian, the 'B' Company commander, who was now 'up front' on the first pimple, pushed a second platoon forward to take the second one. But again the Japanese had realised the strength of the feature and had fortified the position with a well-built rock bunker at the base. With the razorback almost perpendicular at this point, it was only possible to send three men forward to take the strong point, and all were wounded. Grenades also failed to have any effect so Christian decided to pull the platoon back and dig in just forward of the second pimple, overlooking the bunker. It was now 11 a.m. and Christian's company was relieved by 'D' Company.

Left: **The tip of the Pimple taken two weeks later (on January 10, 1944) showing how a path was cut into the peak to permit easier passage — the side slopes here were near vertical. At this stage, the 2/16th Battalion had been relieved by the 2/9th. On the left is Major Fred Loxton, later killed in the 2/9th Battalion attack along the ridge.** *Right:* **Today nothing much has changed here, just some grass cover to hide the wartime foxholes, making walking along the razorback a hazardous affair as those along this stretch are still very deep. Also, access is difficult due to the thick undergrowth on the western slope.**

Looking south back along the razorback approach to the Pimple showing how the ridge forms an angle making the position an excellent observation post for the Japanese. The 2/16th Battalion troops are digging in after the successful attack. (AWM)

Heavy firing continued as the Japanese 78th Regiment reinforced their positions further along the ridge and the Australians continued to clear out Japanese troops dug into its side. One position dug into the almost sheer wall of the ridge was unapproachable and the entrance had been covered with a groundsheet. For about two hours, any grenades dropped onto the strong point were flicked away and it was only when a grenade was tied to the end of a bamboo pole and the pin pulled using a length of string, that the position was silenced.

That night, pioneers, protected from the rock bunker by the cliff angle, chiselled out a track along the edge below the bunker. Meanwhile, 7th Division engineers put together a special blockbuster bomb consisting of a grenade encased in a chemical explosive sealed in a ration tin. At 8.30 a.m. next morning, troops went forward along the new track and hurled the improvised bombs at the bunker. It was blasted away and inside the remains were found the bodies of a Japanese officer and a private who, though just two, had managed to hold up the entire advance.



Left: **Phillip's comparisons are a remarkable achievement in themselves. This shot also gives a good indication of how steep the sides are. The Japanese had good reason to consider their position impregnable as they could completely dominate the Ramu valley from its heights.** *Above:* **Australian .303 rounds found around a foxhole on the northern side of the Pimple.**

View towards Green Sniper's Pimple as it is today. The attack by Lieutenant Scott's platoon was made up the slope from the right. To successfully carry out such an attack over such terrain made their feat even more extraordinary.

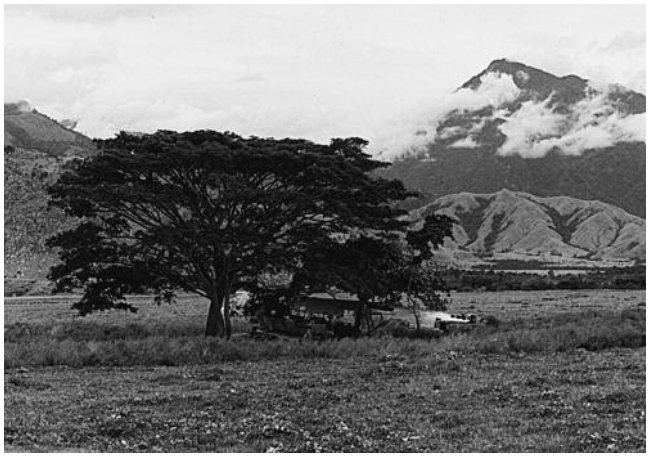
Meanwhile, Lieutenant John Scott's platoon had set out on one of the most extraordinary missions of the campaign. He was to attempt a wide encircling movement of the third pimple via the precipitous eastern slopes of the ridge. By 10.50 a.m., Scott was in position below the target feature and the artillery and mortars began firing smoke to cover his further advance. But the slope here was near vertical so Scott decided to try climbing up through a belt of timber further along the ridge.

At 12.06 p.m., diversionary fire opened up on the left flank to distract the enemy, and six minutes later Scott sent Sergeant Jack Longman and a party of Owen gunners up onto the third pimple. Now under heavy machine-gun fire, Longman and his three men had to pull themselves up the steep slope with one hand and fire their Owen guns with the other. Two of his men were wounded, but Longman and the other man got to the machine gun post and silenced it with Owen gun-fire. Still under fire from other enemy positions, the two men covered the evacuation of their wounded and wiped out another post firing on the rest of the platoon, still struggling up the cliff face led by the wounded Scott. It was an extraordinary feat of arms — nine minutes after Longman had led in the first assault, Scott's platoon was on the third pimple, and now covered the advance of another platoon onto the fourth and highest pimple (later named McCaughey's Knoll — see picture on page 41) further along the ridge. Taking cover behind the razorback, and carefully easing themselves sideways toward the enemy positions, the platoon outflanked the Japanese, caught them by surprise and cleared up the isolated elements who had dug in there.

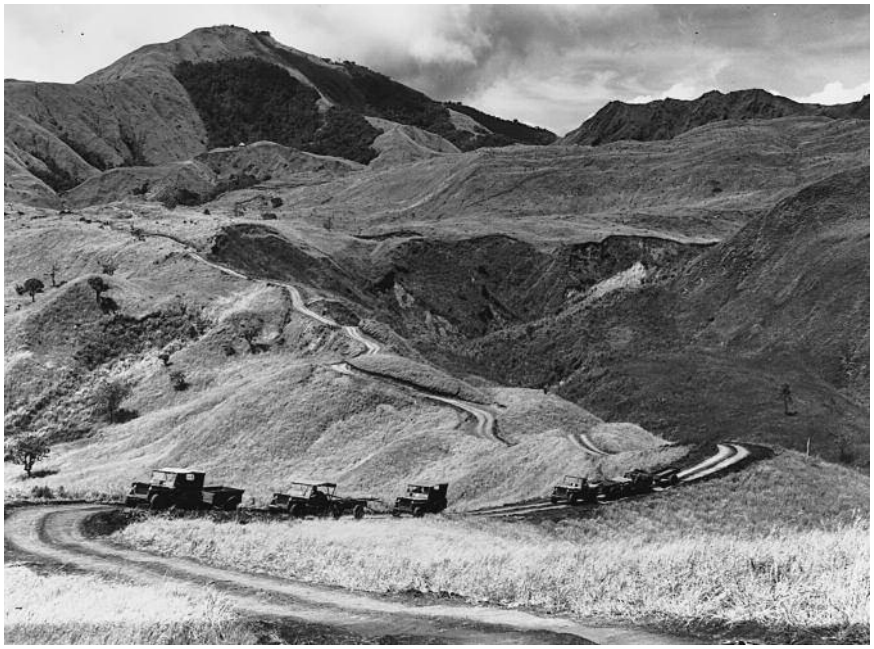
The Australian attack had been a major success, but the main Japanese positions back on Kankiryo Saddle and on the northern end of the ridge remained. The Japanese mountain guns continued to operate and on December 29, Lieutenant Sam McCaughey was killed by shell-fire on the forward pimple that his platoon had earlier occupied. The Australian positions were very exposed and were near impossible to supply, let alone evacuate wounded from, so the troops were withdrawn back to a spur overlooking the third pimple (now known as Green Sniper's Pimple).

The positions here were on such a narrow front that it was only possible for one section at a time to face the enemy who was only 100 yards away. There was a look-out loophole in the sandbags here, but the enemy snipers could put bullets through it, so the forward troops soon had to resort to a periscope to keep watch. Subsequently, a Japanese sniper put a bullet through that as well.

A dead Japanese soldier unearthed on Shaggy Ridge after the battle. On the left is Lieutenant Scott who led his platoon onto the Pimple. (AWM)



Left: **No. 1 Strip at Dumpu looking south — January 8, 1944. (AWM)** *Right:* **Even today there is still a DC-3 sitting on the old aerodrome, albeit rather worse for wear! The airfield has long reverted to farmland.**



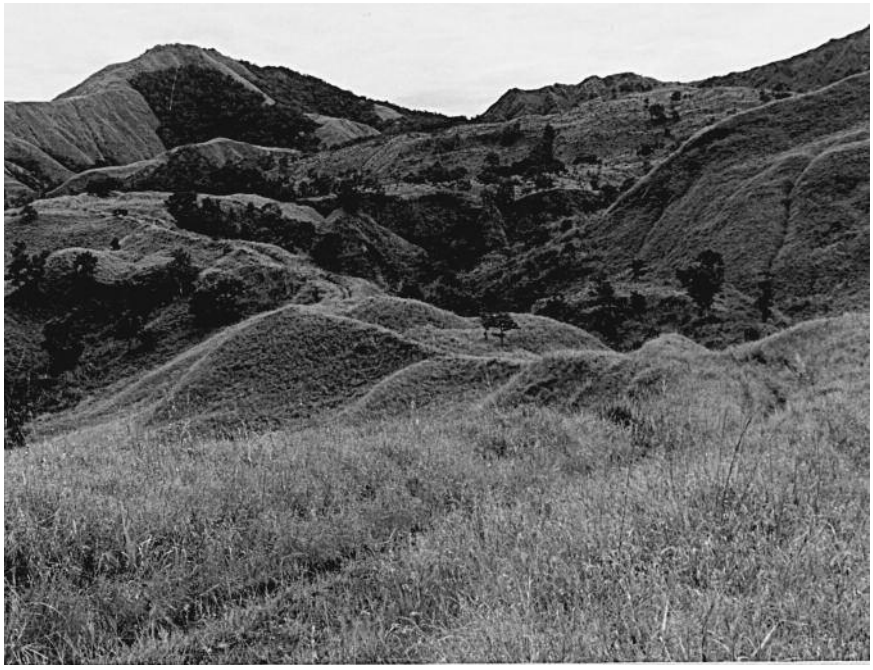
other possibility would be to make a wide encircling movement on the Australian left flank via the Mene river and Canning's Saddle to get onto the dominating Prothero feature at the northern end of Shaggy Ridge. From this position Kankiryo Saddle could be covered, and the rest of the ridge taken from the rear.

The dilemma was how to concentrate a battalion of infantry there while maintaining the element of surprise as even one well-sited machine-gun position could prevent the battalion getting up onto the ridge at this point. In the final plan, there would be three attacks — two as diversions across Cam's Saddle to the east and along Shaggy Ridge itself, with the main strike up onto the northern end of the ridge.

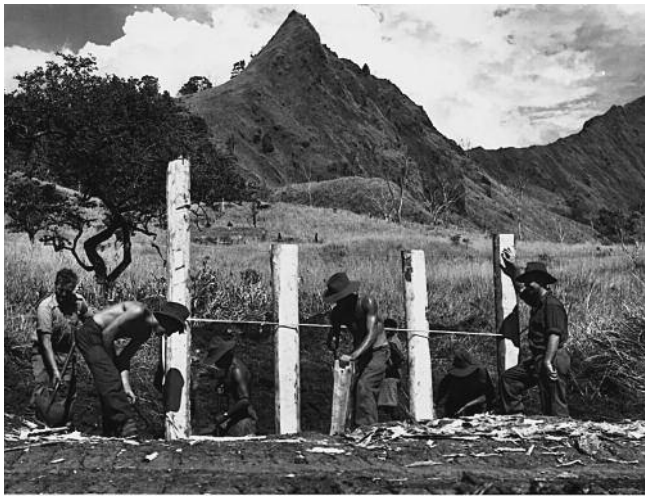
All now hinged on getting the 2/12th Battalion plus supplies onto Canning's Saddle. The Jeep track from Dumpu airstrip was hurriedly pushed through to Guy's Post and supply tracks were built up along the Mene river. Up on the ridge itself, the 2/9th Battalion patrolled forward vigorously as did the 2/10th Battalion across on the right flank around Mainstream. In contrast, the 2/12th patrols up towards Prothero were carried out with great care so as not to alert the enemy to the possibility of an attack there.

In the New Year a new brigade, the 18th, was brought in to relieve the 21st Brigade, and to try to regain the initiative in what must be the most difficult of fighting terrains. *Above:* **To facilitate the movement of men and supplies forward to Shaggy Ridge, a track suitable for Jeeps was established from Dumpu airfield. (AWM)**

General Vasey now faced the New Year with the problem of how to take Shaggy Ridge still on his plate. By January 4, the 21st Brigade had been relieved from this sector and Brigadier Fred Chilton's 18th Brigade had been flown into Dumpu to take over the task. Vasey's priority was to get onto Kankiryo Saddle, but it was obvious that another frontal attack along the top of Shaggy Ridge or an attack up the Faria river valley would be costly and take much time and the Japanese would fall back on the natural fortress of the Kankiryo Saddle and the adjoining northern end of Shaggy Ridge. The



Right: **The road is still there today, though at times difficult to discern beneath the kunai grass. Phillip was able to follow the track in a four-wheel drive vehicle as far as Guy's Post below Shaggy Ridge.**



The ability to supply three battalions was critical to the outcome of the fighting. *Left:* **Here, 2/6th Field Company Engineers work to improve the road to Guy's Post — the staging point for Shaggy Ridge. (AWM)** *Right:* **Phillip discovered that the same culvert was still doing its job over 50 years later. Vic Lemon stands in for the long-forgotten Australian engineers.**

Left: **Members of 'A' Company of the 2/12th Battalion at the Japanese mountain gun position on Prothero 1. Forward troops did not wear helmets as they thought they would be too noisy during the approach. (AWM)** *Right:* **George Dawson was the sergeant with No. 13 Platoon which led the attack in up the side of the ridge into the face of the gun position.**

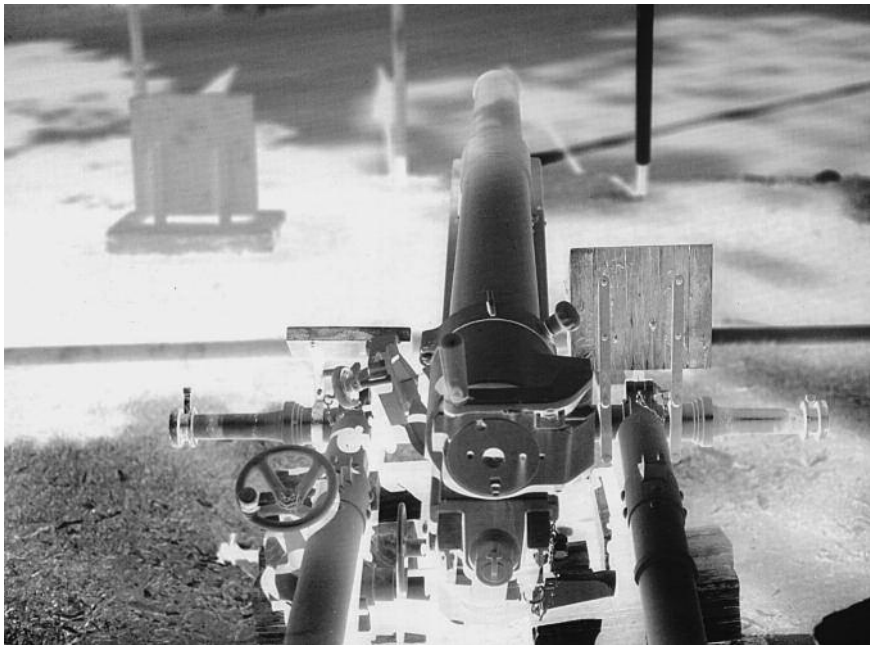
D-Day for 'Cutthroat', as the 18th Brigade attack was named, was set down for January 20. The 2/10th Battalion on the right was the first to move when they attacked towards Cam's Saddle. Meanwhile, artillery and air attacks hit the Prothero area of Shaggy Ridge and the Kankiryo Saddle. On the same day, the 2/12th Battalion moved out from Geyton's Hill along the rising Mene river, reaching Canning's Saddle at 3.30 p.m. The troops spent the night here and at 8.30 a.m. next morning (January 21) they moved forward to the start line on the crest below Prothero 1. The approach was so steep that ladders had to be used. Silence was vital as a single company advanced along the razorback ridge which was the only way up and there would be no artillery support requested unless surprise was lost.

The troops got to within 100 yards of the summit of Prothero 1 when they encountered a small enemy demolition party. Fortunately, they did not have time to blow the one-tonne explosive charge that would have severed the razorback track, but they were able to warn other defenders and the gun position on the summit. The Japanese 75mm gun supported by a machine gun position opened up on Major Ian Cameron's company at 100 yards range firing tree bursts and causing serious casualties. George Dawson was the platoon sergeant in No. 13 Platoon, the lead platoon in the attack. He well remembers the moment; the time was about 3 p.m. and the Japanese mountain gun which had been firing on the 2/9th Battalion attack further along the ridge was now switched to fire at the advancing Australians. Due to the near point-blank range (less than 100 yards), they were firing percussion charges directly into the trees around the Australian positions. With no width to the attack, and with an adjacent machine gun bunker adding its fire, there were serious casualties and the attack was stopped in its tracks. Artillery support was called for over telephone lines laid under fire from the forward positions. Signalman 'Bluey' Green went forward three times to repair breaks, though wounded at the time. He was later awarded the Military Medal.

The front here was only two men wide but, as casualties mounted further, Lieutenant Charlie Braithwaite's platoon, now with artillery support, moved forward, and at 5.30 p.m. rushed the Japanese positions. In an extraordinary act of individual valour, a Bren gunner in the assault, Private Richard Lugge, leapt from an embankment directly into the line of fire and, dropping flat, opened fire on the gun position before rolling sideways, shifting fire and knocking out the Japanese machine gun bunker which was holding up the attack. It was another example of the ability of the Australians to turn a battle with individual initiative and bravery, and the rest of the platoon was now able to move forward and finish off the Japanese gun position with a percussion grenade: a 7lb tin of amatol with a grenade attached as previously used in the 2/16th assault in December. All 16 Japanese defenders were killed and the gun was captured. Also found in a nearby bunker was a sophisticated range-finder which was hurriedly sent back to Dumpu and on to the United States.

In terms of this campaign, the cost to the battalion had been horrific: on this first day, 11 had been killed in action, 48 wounded, two of which mortally, but the Australians now controlled the key point in the Japanese defences.

The night brought its own horrors. The gun had been captured too late to get the wounded out and they lay all night in the mud and rain. The stretcher bearers and the medical officer, Captain John MacDonald,



At the end of the fighting, the Japanese 75mm mountain gun was recovered by the Australians and today rests at the army jungle training centre at Canungra near Brisbane. With a range of five miles, it could cover the main area of battle along the ridge from its position well to the rear. However, it could not reach the Australian gun positions further back, whereas the Australian 25-pdrs could hit its position. The wheels have been removed for restoration and there is no gun shield fitted. Two memorial plaques are attached to the gun, commemorating its capture and restoration.

Right: **January 20, 1944, and preparations are underway for the 2/9th Battalion's 'A' Company assault on Green Sniper's Pimple. Major Loxton, the company OC, is seated second from the bottom with Sergeant McDowell, who would take in the lead platoon, below him. Sergeant Vern 'Snow' Hansen who would control the supporting mortar barrage is second from right.**

worked through the night while 'D' Company sheltering in their water-filled foxholes spent the night throwing back probing attacks by the Japanese. Many men remembered the bravery of Tex Parnell who had had one arm all but torn from him by enemy fire during the fighting. When told by Captain MacDonald that it would have to come off, Tex replied 'Right-o Doc, rip it off'. Sadly, the loss of his arm and the cold and wet of the night had its effect and he died the next day.

Meanwhile, on the same day as the 2/12th attack, the 2/9th Battalion was to continue the attack along the other end of the ridge,

Below: **Meanwhile 'C' Company covered 'A' Company's advance along the side of the ridge below them. The white sheets are there to indicate the Australian positions to aircraft and the rope is for hauling the wounded (and dead) up or down the sheer slopes. This photo was taken on Intermediate Pimple, the most forward position before the assault. Major Loxton was killed here by shell-fire as he stood up using binoculars to follow his company's attack. (AWM)**

over the same ground as the 2/16th Battalion the previous month. The 2/9th Battalion plan was to first take Green Sniper's Pimple and then attack the dominating feature of McCaughey's Knoll from the steep jungle-covered western slopes. Major Fred Loxton's 'A' Company would lead the assault. As the senior company commander he had requested the assignment. Sergeant McDowell, who had already taken part in three night recon patrols to Green Sniper's Pimple, would lead the forward platoon in the assault on the ridge. Timing his attack to the minute, he was able to get among the Japanese defenders on the eastern slope of the ridge before they could recover from the preceding airstrike. Nonetheless, in fierce fighting on the side of the ridge, the Australians lost seven killed and 17 wounded, almost the entire initial assault force.

Below left: **Hansen (right) with Jim Fountain who was a Vickers gunner up on the ridge. When the Japanese counter-attack came he fired off six belts of 250 rounds each in a four-minute period into the Japanese positions.** *Below:* **Major Loxton's grave in Lae War Cemetery. His brother Sam was an Australian test cricketer after the war.**

These 2/9th troops were pictured on January 23 moving around the crest of the eastern slops between Intermediate and Green Sniper's Pimple. (AWM)

Private Ron McCauley was in the lead platoon, his section clambering down around the east side of the ridge and then scaling the near sheer slope to the tip of Green Sniper's Pimple. He remembers the preliminary air strike well when two 500lb bombs skipped off the slope and passed directly over his position huddled in tight against the slope under a slight projection. Many of the casualties came from Japanese snipers who were in the trees on the west side of the ridge. Ron was himself injured during the fierce grenade exchanges across the summit of the ridge. He was sheltering in a Japanese trench when a grenade landed next to him. He got out quick to find another grenade landing, so dived back in as both exploded. Wounded in the head, he would make his way back off the ridge that night.

The effort needed to climb up that sheer slope to attack the Japanese positions like some latter-day knights storming the ramparts was well described at the time by a 2/9th infantryman who was quoted in the Australian War Memorial publication *Jungle Warfare*:

'You've got to climb, climb where there are no holds and the slopes fall down like a leaning wall. You're flat — you're upright — you're slipping. Your chest burns with the pain of effort and you fight for gulps of air. The climbing is worse than the firing. You don't care about the bullets much, you only want to reach the peak where you can lie and rest. . . .

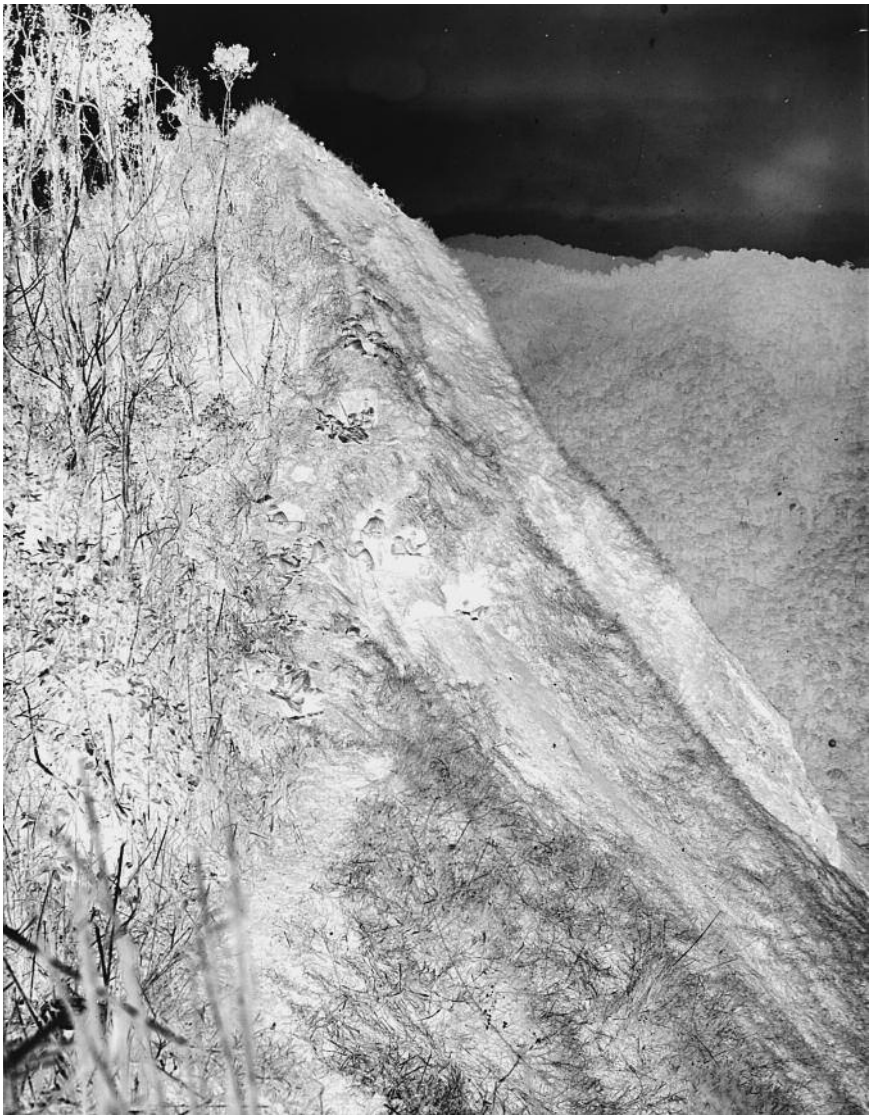
'Up, up, hand over hand. The crest is immediately above you now, and to your right and left you can see the holes from which comes the Japanese cross-fire. There is a small cliff, also on the right, which will give you some protection. You scurry to it and huddle for a minute. A grenade rolls towards you . . . You cower away from it and the burst, quaintly, seems as large as the bomb which landed near you before.

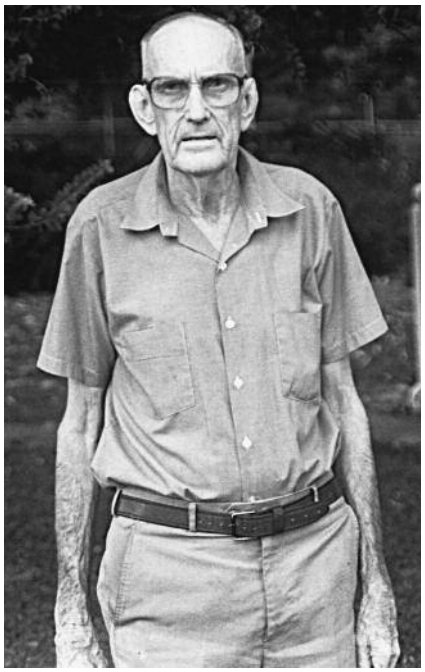
'You start to scrabble up the cliff. You reach the top . . . and, as you tense yourself for the levering over the rim, a burst of fire chews the earth within inches of your hands. Panic-stricken you drop.

'You haven't seen a Jap yet and you haven't fired a shot. There is only the momentary expectation of another grenade or another burst stitching you into oblivion. Beside you, a cicada sings in the kunai . . .

It is very difficult to get a good comparison here as the slopes are dangerously steep and the undergrowth on the west side prevents access along the razorback from that direction. Phillip took his photo from Intermediate Pimple — a solid lump of rock which juts out to the east of the ridge crest and falls away vertically on two sides. 'There never was country such as this', wrote one 2/9th infantryman.

The more one looks at the photographs — which themselves are miraculous taken as they were during the battle — the more one feels the futility of fighting for possession of this remote and insignificant hilltop. This remarkable shot shows 'A' Company on Green Sniper's Pimple on January 23. The Japanese were positioned on the left-hand side and the Australians on the right when the fighting mainly involved grenade throwing across the ridge. Ron McCauley was positioned in a captured trench just below the peak of the Pimple when he was wounded by Japanese grenades. (AWM)

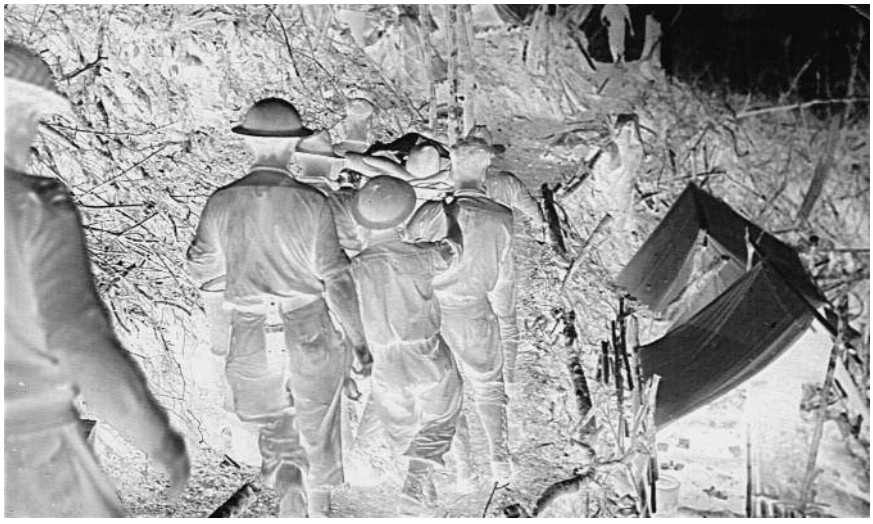




Ron McCauley today — the attack on Green Sniper's Pimple was his first and last action of the war.

'You reach the crest and dig in, not showing your head over the top. You hold one side of the pimple and the Japs the other. Behind you from Intermediate Pimple you are receiving protection from and enemy charge. They do charge once without success . . .

'Thirty feet from the top you lie, and the grenades commence to rain as the Japs, from the shelter of the lip of the hill, hurl them at you. The mountain guns open a barrage against which Brens can do nothing. This is Hell . . . Shrapnel is whining around you and there is nowhere you can go for cover. Go over the ridge and you're a sitting shot for snipers in the trees. You must lie . . . and lie . . . and wait . . . and wait. Wait for the caress of agony from flying steel. One by one men are being wounded around you. Those who can, walk back through the barrage; others, too badly wounded to move, must remain. You watch stretcher-bearers hauling wounded up the cliffs in strait jackets along the terrain you have passed. There never was country such as this.'

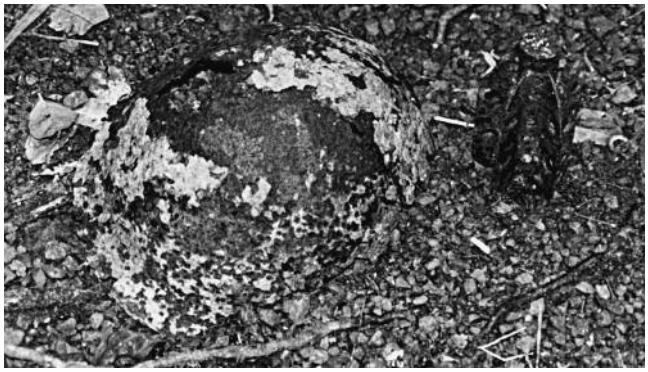


Left: **Wounded from the 'A' Company attack coming back along the track past the Pimple after being hauled up the side of the ridge in crude slings. Further back on the ridge native carriers would take over for the descent to Guy's Post.** *Right:* **The track here is still well defined today, the only place on the entire ridge where it is so.**

Snow Hansen's 3-inch mortar section firing in support of the troops forward on Green Sniper's Pimple. Initially, the range was 800 yards but during the Japanese counter-attack it went out to 1,600 yards. Vince Lacey controls the mortar alignment, the loader is Harold Hopes and Alfie Franklin readies another bomb. Snow Hansen is out of frame taking firing instructions from Henry Henricksen up with 'A' Company.

The Japanese response was to heavily shell the Australian positions and then counter-attack. Major Fred Loxton, the company commander, was killed on Intermediate Pimple when shell-burst hit a tree beside him and his body fell to the bottom of the ridge. Further back, two Australian mortars in support kept up a constant barrage as requested by Sergeant Henry Henricksen, exposed in his observation post forward on Green Sniper's Pimple, and their accurate fire cut the Japanese counter-attack to pieces. Sergeant Vern 'Snow' Hansen controlled one of the mortars but had major difficulties hearing Henricksen's directions as the nearby Vickers guns hammered out in support. At this point, the Japanese also lost the support of their mountain gun which was the same one now holding off the 2/12th Battalion at the other end

Mortar fin relics and a rusting Japanese helmet found on the ridge in the area where the Japanese counter-attack was stopped by mortar fire.



Left: **On Kankiryo Saddle, Japanese 70mm shells show where the mountain gun position was situated. Nearby lies a rusting Australian helmet.** *Right:* **An Australian 25-pounder shell which found its mark on the saddle but never exploded.**

Marching out of the Finisterre Ranges. Shaggy Ridge has been left behind, but for those who battled for its capture, it would never be forgotten.

of the ridge. During the night, the Australian wounded were hauled up the side of the ridge in crude slings for evacuation.

The next morning, January 22, brought further demands on the 2/12th Battalion: they were to attack a second knoll further along the ridge known as Prothero 2. Nothing would stop the men that morning and, following a preliminary artillery bombardment, they cheered madly and rushed the Japanese positions firing every weapon they had. Further up the ridge where the track again narrowed, tactical sense took over and a grenade party was sent forward to deal with the Japanese LMG position on the summit. All the while, the gunnery officer, Captain Whyte, kept the artillery support coming, a difficult job with the artillery firing directly towards the Australians who were now facing south along the ridge. At 12.15 p.m., it could be reported that Prothero 2 had fallen and the Japanese holding Shaggy Ridge were now facing certain defeat.

Now the 2/9th Battalion also continued their attack on the ridge, their objective being McCaughey's Knoll. Once again, the plan was to out-manoeuvre the Japanese defenders but this time the Australians would try to outflank the position via the precipitous jungle-covered western slopes. The mortars and artillery kept up a fairly heavy fire on the knoll while 'D' Company formed up for the attack. Zero hour was 6 p.m. when the leading platoon began moving silently up through the undergrowth and trees. They got within 100 feet of the knoll before the defenders spotted them but, as the Japanese had their machine guns positioned for a frontal attack, only rifle fire and grenades were available to cover the flank. 'D' Company stormed the position and took the knoll with few casualties. Once again, the ability of the Australian infantry to improvise attacking options over seemingly impassable terrain won the battle for them.

With this key Japanese position now taken, the Queenslanders of the 2/9th Battalion rapidly advanced north along the ridge, hoping to link up with the 2/12th Battalion before dark. The 2/12th similarly pushed south to meet them, but nightfall found the battalions still some 900 yards apart and held up by machine-gun fire. However, they were able to join up early the next morning as the remaining defenders on the ridge had withdrawn to Kankiryo Saddle and Crater Hill during the night. Shaggy Ridge had fallen.

Following on the heels of the Japanese, the Australians moved down onto Kankiryo Saddle the same day, finding the enemy gun position and 150 rounds of 75mm ammunition abandoned. The Japanese had now occupied strong positions on the adjoining Crater Hill and it was evident that they intended to fight it out, despite now being surrounded. The Australians moved onto the hill, through some timber shattered from the bombardments, and the feature was in their hands the next day. It was a strong position with some 40 bunkers on the hill alone and many more on the razorback leading to it as well as a maze of communication trenches and tunnels. The hill had been devastated by the bombardments. Frank Rolleston from the 2/9th, who had earlier taken part in the 'D' Company attack on McCaughey's Knoll, was in the final assault:

'The scene on Crater Hill was the worst I ever saw during the war as far as damage from shelling and bombing was concerned for almost every tree had been blasted or shattered, with some huge trees several feet in diameter broken in halves. Some of the craters from bombs were ten feet deep and 30 feet across, while fragments of human remains could be seen plastered high up on the battered trees still standing. Some of the enemy weapons were twisted up like wire, from the heat and bomb blast.'

The fight for Shaggy Ridge was over and, apart from clearing up operations in the area, the Japanese army in front of Madang had been defeated. With the American landing behind them at Saidor effectively trapping what forces remained, Madang fell in April and the Allies had effective control of the New Guinea mainland. A major Japanese force remained at Wewak and much fighting lay ahead to clear them out from there also, but any effective Japanese influence on the mainland ended with the fall of Shaggy Ridge.

For the Australians, it was a campaign carried out with extraordinary ingenuity and courage and the comparatively low casualties suffered when compared to the Kokoda trail and Gona/Buna campaigns showed they had developed into unmatched jungle fighters. And, as in the earlier campaigns, the contribution of the native carriers was critical; their ability to carry supplies up onto the ridge and evacuate the wounded off it was extraordinary. They would forever be remembered as the 'fuzzy wuzzy angels'.

For the Australians who were there, they would also remember; remember the arduous climbing, the muddy jungle, the steaming hot kunai, the murderous shell-fire, the deadly snipers and the friends they left behind. They would never forget Shaggy Ridge.

Amongst the foothills above Dumpu, the flat plains of the Ramu valley still beckon after the energy-sapping slopes of Shaggy Ridge. Another of Phillip Bradley's remarkable comparisons in a land of bitter memories for Australians. Victory at Shaggy Ridge came in January 1944 and allowed the Australians to push through to the north coast in the following months, ultimately isolating the remaining Japanese forces around Wewak further to the west where they held out till the end of the war. For the victorious battalions of the 7th Division who had fought on Shaggy Ridge, a return to Australia awaited before they once more came together in July 1945 for their final campaign of the war when they stormed ashore at Balikpapan and recaptured the Borneo oilfields. Tragically, their commander, Major General George Vasey, would not be with them. Flying from Cairns for New Guinea on March 5, 1945, his plane went down off the Australian coast, killing all on board.